COMIC BOOK
MARKETPLACE
No. 99
February 2003
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Yes, the name of the magazine is *Comic Book Marketplace*. It's mostly about buying and selling vintage comic books. That has been, and will continue to be, the focus of our interest, within the larger realm of "The Comics" in general.

Virtually any distinction that is made between comic strips that ran in American newspapers and comic features in comic books is superficial. Newspaper comics, which started to appear with regularity in major metropolitan newspapers in the mid-1890s, had blossomed into a new major medium by the early 1900s, a new and uniquely American art form.

The art of the comic strip took its rightful place in American popular culture, alongside the movies, popular music, and commercial radio and (later) television. Stars were made. Cartoonists like Bud Fisher, George McManus, and Winsor McCay created comic strips that became, through syndication, popular nationwide. They were the new celebrities.

Early comic creators like Palmer Cox (*The Brownies*) and Richard Outcault (*Yellow Kid* and *Buster Brown*) quickly learned that licensing their characters to advertisers could be eyen more lucrative than the income from the comic strip itself, and character-based advertising was born. A wide variety of products, ranging from clothing and shoes to toys and games, started to appear, and advertisers quickly learned that using well-known comic characters to sell products worked.

When regularly-published comic magazines (which we now call comic books) came along in the 1930s, a new demand was created for writers and artists, and, to a man, these new writers and artists aspired to reach the pinnacle of success in their field by someday having their own syndicated comic strip. Many comic strip artists had become millionaires, but there were no millionaires creating comic books.

So when Will Eisner and Jack Kirby were little boys, when Carl Barks and Walt Kelly were breaking in as artists, they were heavily influenced by the newspaper strips they followed. Without newspaper strips, there would be no comic books! And to truly understand the comics medium, and the artists whose work we admire, some knowledge of newspaper comics and how they influenced comic books is necessary.

This is why it is exasperating when we receive letters that say, "Stick to comic books, we don't like newspaper comics."

They are the same thing! Only the format of publication and the size of the panels are different. I have often thought that there is another factor that comes into play: When you read a continuity of newspaper strips, say for instance a run of *Dick Tracy* pages, there is no beginning and no end! No matter where you start and stop reading, you know that tomorrow there will be more. It's like watching a TV show that ends with the caption "To Be Continued." Our desire for instant gratification hates this—we want the rest of the story, now.

When you pick up a comic book, you usually read a story that has a beginning and an end, no loose threads left dangling. Could this be one of the reasons why so many of you prefer comic books to newspaper strips? Certainly the artists and writers who work in the newspaper strips are just as talented as the ones who work in comic books.

Historians have generally agreed to call Outcault's *Yellow Kid* the first American comic strip, or comic feature, since it involved a recurring character and a story told in word balloons, even though the Yellow Kid was more of a single-panel cartoon than a sequence of panels. Modern collectors of Victorian and Platinum age comics have discovered earlier examples of what might be called "comic strips" which pre-date the Yellow Kid of the 1890s. And so the discussion continues—where did this art form start, and where is it headed?

Russ

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MIKE WILBUR
Columnists

PRICING & MARKET REPORTS
ROBERT M. OVERSTREET
Senior Pricing Editor

MICHAEL NAIMAN
Market Reports Editor
mnaiman1@cox.net

MARK HUESMAN
Pricing Coordinator
feedback@gemstonepub.com

ADVERTISING
ANGELA MEYER
Traffic & Operations Manager
ec@gemstonepub.com
Toll Free (800) 322-7978

BRENDA BUSICK
Creative Director
bbrenda@gemstonepub.com

RESEARCH
JOE McGUCKIN
mjoe@diamondgalleries.com

CUSTOMER SERVICE & ADMINISTRATION
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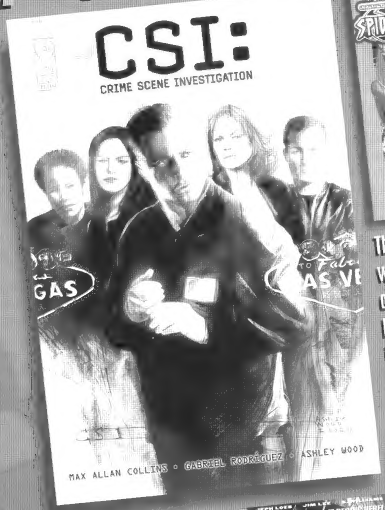

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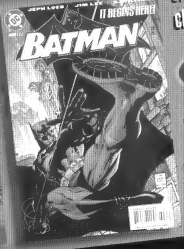

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MARKETPLACE MAIL

Gee, man

I enjoyed reading issue #96 on Milton Caniff. The article and photos from Shel Dorf were a great look into Milton Caniff's life. I am also happy to learn of the revival of The Shield. I thought the readers might enjoy seeing three of the badges from The Shield G-Man Club as described in the article.

Tom Gordon
via e-mail

Caniffty

Really enjoyed the extensive articles on Milton Caniff. I'm sure that you'll get a lot of positive comments on the presentations. Good stuff, indeed!

A couple of other things: some years ago, when I was up in Idaho Springs, Colorado, I came across a statue of Steve Canyon in the town square. I haven't been there in a long, long time, but it might still be there. Perhaps one of the *CBM* readers who might live up in Denver could visit there, take some pictures, and send them in. That would be a nice extra to the Caniff pictures. And why a statue is there, I don't know. That might also be something interesting to find out about. Maybe that same person could talk to someone with the town government and find out.

Secondly, I came across something else in the October 25, 1943, issue of *Life* magazine. There was a small article about artists who used themselves as models and put themselves into their art. One of the artists was Milton Caniff. Hope this scanned all right and is readable. Caniff drew a picture of himself at his drawing board and the background is made up of creatures of his imagination. I found this interesting and thought you might like it.

Steve Fears
Oklahoma City, OK

Milton Caniff, creator of popular *Terry and the Pirates*, drew a background of creatures of his imagination. Caniff also does a strip called *Male Call* solely for Army.

Did they use SuperGlue™?

I'm delighted with the latest issue of *Comic Book Marketplace*, showcasing the talents of Curt Swan.

I appreciate Edward Zeno's difficulty finding copies of Swan *Superman* dailies. My only copies are pasted in a notebook containing strips from May 25 through November 12, 1960. If I remember correctly, I got the notebook for free as a throw-in when I purchased a *Spider-Man* #1 from "Desi" DeSimone in the early '70s. The notebook's cover was replaced with the cover of *Superman* #141 ("Superman's Return to Krypton"), cover-dated November 1960. The May 25 to July 2 strips featured "The Super Servant of Crime." This story first appeared in *Superman* #130 (Jul 1959) and was later reprinted in *Superman* #209 (Aug 1968), where I first read it. July 4 to August 13 featured "The Super Sword," which first saw print as the cover story in *Superman* #124 (Sep 1958). The August 14 to November 12 strips covered "Superman's Return to Krypton," which also appeared in *Superman* #141. It's interesting to note that the "Return to Krypton" story must have been appearing concurrently on the stands and in the newspapers, whereas the other two strips appeared in the newspapers some time after their first comic book appearance. I'd guess the Super Servant and Sword stories were picked because of their general audience appeal rather than for their ability to sell comics, as the Super Servant story was not cover featured, and thus there's no way to know if it was responsible for sales.

The notebook was full at the end of the "Return to Krypton" story, which finished up on the very last notebook page, as though it was pasted in later, rather than as the strip appeared. I wonder if someone out there has the earlier strips pasted into similar notebooks, or perhaps one beginning November 13 with the Wayne Boring art?

Thanks again for a great publication!

Herb Cushing
Greenwood, IN

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All Those Marvel-ous Girls

No Company Published More Comics for Girls

by Michelle Nolan

Just about everyone knows the queens of the comic book world in the 1940s and '50s were Betty and Veronica, affectionately known for so many years as "Archie's Girls." Even so, Betty Cooper and Veronica Lodge had pretty stiff competition—for circulation, not just for Archie Andrews.

Patsy Walker, Marvel's red-headed answer to blonde Betty, and Hedy Wolfe, the raven-haired counterpart for Veronica, started their long flirtation with four-color frolics a little less than three years after Archie and his gang first developed in the pages of *Pep Comics* #22 (Dec 1941) and the first few 1942 issues of *Pep*.

As competitors for the Archie titles, Patsy and Hedy were the first of a lengthy line of leggy lasses to emerge from the Timely/Atlas/Marvel factory in the next two decades. They were also among the first of dozens of teen humor heroines in the comics.

Nobody, but nobody, produced as many titles featuring fabulous females as editor Stan Lee and his subordinates at Marvel, primarily in the era between the decline of the Golden Age superheroes and the beginning of Marvel's Silver Age answers to DC's super surge.

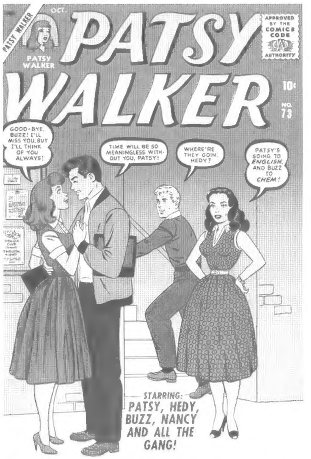
Checking comic book historian Dan Stevenson's complete issue-by-issue data and Jim Vadeboncoeur's lists of his unsurpassed collection of the company, I counted no less than 1,047 comics published over a three-decade period from 1944-73 devoted by title to the teenage and young adult likes of *Millie the Model*, *Patsy Walker*, *Hedy DeVine* and *My Girl Pearl*, to name only four. And I may have overlooked a few. Plus, the count doesn't include titles like *Georgie* and *Frankie*, which also featured frantic females.

Archie, of course, produced more issues with funny-book femmes over the same time frame, but many of them were devoted to the likes of Archie and Jughead by title. With Marvel and its predecessors, though, it was girls, girls and more girls — plus women, women and more women.

The long-unsinkable Millie Collins is by far the best remembered of the Marvel crowd, primarily because she lasted into the mid-1970s—nearly a decade beyond Patsy Walker, who last appeared in her original incarnation in *Patsy and Hedy* #110 (Feb 1967).

But in her heyday, no females in comics but Archie's Girls were a match for Patsy Walker, who appeared along with female foil Hedy Wolfe in at least 331 comic books in the 1944-59 period alone—not to mention the last few years of the *Patsy Walker* and *Patsy and Hedy* titles, which continued to be published well into the Marvel Age of Comics in the 1960s.

Unlike the vast majority of comic characters who appeared in more than 300 issues over that time frame, Patsy Walker was strictly a character origi-


OCT.
PATSY WALKER
PATSY WALKER
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
10¢
NO. 73
GOOD-BYE BUZZ! I'LL MISS YOU, BUT I'LL THINK OF YOU ALWAYS!
TIME WILL BE SO MEANINGLESS WITH OUT YOU, PATSY!
WHERE'RE THEY GOIN', HEDY?
SALLY'S GOING TO ENGLAND, AND BUZZ IS GOING TO CHEM!
STARRING: PATSY, HEDY, BUZZ, NANCY AND ALL THE GANG!

Patsy Walker #73 (Oct 1957), the first non-Atlas Marvel!

nated for comic books. She was designed solely to compete with the Archie gang and to appeal to female readers, who were a huge proportion of the 1940s comic book fans. Patsy Walker never appeared on television, radio or in books, comic strips or the movies, either in cartoon or live-action form.

To the best of my knowledge, Patsy Walker lived only in the pages of comic books, and as such was unique. I doubt if any other 1940s or '50s character ever appeared so many times only in a comic book format.

Nor was any character more important to Marvel than Patsy Walker following the Atlas implosion in the summer of 1957. Forced by economics to circulate his comics in a decade-long agreement through DC's distributor, Independent News, Marvel publisher Martin Goodman was limited to printing eight comics per month (96 issues per year) in 1958 and 1959, with the number increasing in small increments through the 1960s.

Patsy Walker, *Patsy and Hedy* and *Miss America* (featuring Patsy and Hedy, of course) were three of Marvel's 16 bi-monthly titles published through 1958. I wonder how many Marvel fans today realize that nearly 20 percent of Marvel's comic books in 1958 featured two teen-age girls? In fact, the first true "Marvel Age" comic—minus any such symbol, of course—was *Patsy Walker* #73 (Oct 1957). The last comic book with the Atlas globe, noted cover artist Joe Maneely's classic *Dippy Duck* one-shot, also was dated Oct 1957.

Patsy and Hedy regularly appeared for four years in a fourth title, *Patsy and Her Pals*, for 29 issues before it was one of the dozens of victims of the implosion. Atlas also published a fifth Patsy Walker title, *Girls' Life*, for six issues in 1954. This unique project—subtitled "Patsy Walker's Own Magazine for Girls!"—was supposedly edited by no less than Patsy herself!

When Marvel earlier endured a much less obvious implosion in 1950—resulting in the cancellation of many titles and a reduction to quarterly status for most others—*Patsy Walker* and *Miss America* remained bi-monthlies. Apparently, they were the company's best-selling comic books for a long time.

Patsy Walker first appeared in *Miss America* #2 (Nov 1944), which was an odd hybrid of heroics and hijinks—Timely's answer to the best-selling *Calling All Girls* from Parents Magazine. *Miss America* #1 was a 1944 one-shot featuring the eponymous super heroine from the pages of *Marvel Mystery Comics*, beautifully drawn by Pauline Loth.

Miss America #2 cover-featured a real woman in a nifty Miss America costume, shown from the belt up. I wonder who the model was and whether this costume still exists? This wonderful 68-page comic is one of the scarcest of all Timely issues. The issue led off with a 16-page Miss America story starring 16-year-old Madeline Joyce, who gained her super powers while trapped in a scientist's laboratory during an electrical storm. (Well, if you can believe a radioactive spider biting a certain teen-age boy 18 years later....) The only other comic strip in the issue, which is mostly text and photos, was a seven-page story introducing Patsy Walker, her family, boyfriend Buzz Baxter and rival Hedy.

Miss America stories appeared only through *Miss America* #5 (Feb 1945). The *Miss America* title had an odd, convoluted numbering system of volumes and numbers, but take my word for it that it ran 126 issues through #93 (Nov 1958), with Patsy Walker apparently appearing in every issue but #1. The *Miss America* title was one of the victims of Lee's short new line of fantasy titles.

For those who want a far more detailed description of Patsy & Co., a dear friend, Trina Robbins—the noted pop culture historian, author and artist—includes a nifty chapter covering Marvel's females in her groundbreaking book *From Girls to Grrlz* (1999). I had been collecting Marvel's humor comics for years—Trina and I have been known to dig furiously and ever-so-hopefully through the same

Miss America #2 (Nov 1944), in which Patsy Walker is introduced.

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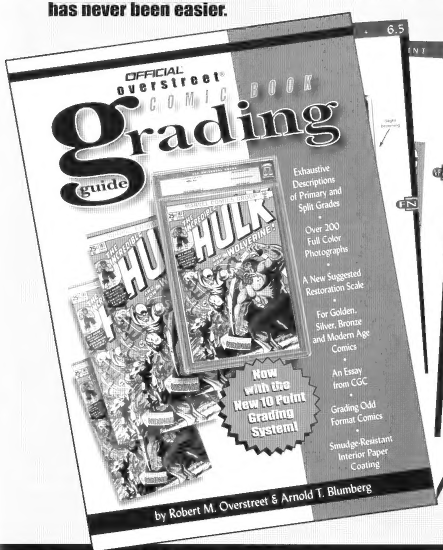

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boxes, hoping to uncover cheap reading copies!—and yet I still learned a lot from this chapter by Trina. She was one of the millions of girls who grew up loving Patsy Walker as well as Katy Keene and the Archie series characters.

Marvel, though, produced far more than Patsy Walker, Hedy Wolfe and Millie the Model in the world of publishing female-oriented comics. In fact, at least 17 other Marvel comics of the 1940s and '50s were titled after girls and women (not even counting the Little Lulu knockoffs). Let's run down the list: *Cindy*, *Della Vision*, *Hedy DeVine*, *Jeannie*, *Junior Miss*, *Lana*, *Margie*, *Meet Miss Bliss*, *Mitzi*, *My Friend Irma*, *My Girl Pearl*, *Nellie the Nurse*, *Patty Powers*, *Rusty*, *Sherry the Showgirl*, *Showgirls*, *Tessie the Typist* and *Wendy Parker*.

It's interesting to note all the career-girl themes, albeit with an emphasis on glamour. Even sub-texts. I wonder how many young girls today—of the sort who read *Tessie* in the 1940s—even know what the word "typist" means!

My Friend Irma, usually drawn by the inimitable Dan DeCarlo before he joined Archie, was taken from the wildly popular radio and television show—one of the few such Marvel titles. Irma Peterson was a wacky secretary who for a long time was the public's favorite "dumb blonde," appropriately played by the hilarious Marie Wilson. When the television show's original run ended in 1954, so did the Atlas comic book.

In a much more unorthodox nod to radio, Marvel converted its *Junior Miss* title from a comic book featuring teen heart-throb Cindy Smith into a radio adaptation for the last two issues, the highly scarce #38 (May 1950) and #39 (Aug 1950). *Junior Miss* was a short-running CBS radio situation comedy, first appearing in 1948 and starring 20-year-old Shirley Temple as wacky bobbysoxer Judy Graves. The radio show was a knockoff of NBC's *A Date with Judy*, which debuted in 1943 and four years later became a long-running DC comic.

Breaking out of the super-hero mold near the end of World War II, Marvel published a 36-page *Junior Miss* one-shot dated Winter 1944 (with a full-page house ad for *Miss America #5*, dated Feb 1945), "For the teen-age girl" was the cover blurb, and the strips included the life stories of Frank Sinatra and June Allyson, plus the only appearances (to the best of my knowledge) of Betty Lane, a girl reporter strip, and Peggy Brooks, one of Marvel's first teen characters. This one-shot title is one of the toughest 1940s Marvel comics to find. *Junior Miss* did not appear again until #24 (Apr 1947) began a 16-issue run.

Marvel did another TV imitation with its four-issue run of *Meet Miss Bliss* in 1955, obviously inspired by the popular radio and TV show *Our Miss Brooks*. This title, written by Stan Lee and drawn by the ubiquitous Al Hartley, was an amusing, light-hearted look at an elementary school teacher's romantic complications, and deserved a longer run.

Meet Miss Bliss appeared during that confusing period when the creation of the Comics Code Authority forced publishers to try a variety of formats in the wake of the disappearance of most of the violent titles. Another such try-anything title was the unusual Lee-Hartley team-up effort *Della Vision*, a slapstick strip featuring the star of the *Pringle Pretzel Hour*. You must admit that sounds just like a 1950s show!

"Thru these pages you will enter the glamorous world of television" the cover blurb promised, giving no indication this was a wacky humor title. In the lead story in the last issue, #3 (Aug 1955), Mr. Pringle introduces his nephew, the homely Gormly Bristle, saying that "I'm sure that Gormly will one day take his place alongside the big names of show business!" to which Della's handsome male co-worker replies, "Yeah...like Rin-Tin-Tin, Lassie, and Trigger!"

MILLIE THE MODEL, SHERRY, CHILI, AND OTHERS IN...
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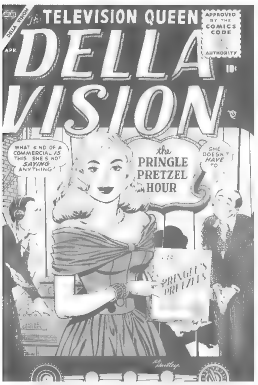
NNN

Showgirls #2 (Sep 1957), the last issue.

With lines like that, the *Della Vision* title was immediately replaced by the four-issue run of *Patty Powers* #4-7, yet another Lee-Hartley glamour-girl effort, this one about a movie star. All seven of these issues of *Della Vision* and *Patty Powers* are mighty tough to locate today—quite possibly because they didn't sell well.

Lee and Hartley weren't ready to give up, coming through with six issues of the classic *Sherry the Showgirl* in 1956-57 (#1-3, 5-7) and three issues of *Showgirls* in 1957 (#4, 1-2), on which Dan DeCarlo also worked. Both titles were victims of the Atlas implosion and deserved a much better fate, because they were genuinely funny, albeit often infused with the then not-so-politically-incorrect sexism of the day.

Most of these strips were pretty lightweight stuff, but occasionally one of them would make you think. A one-page gag strip in *Sherry the Showgirl* #6 (Jun 1957) has Sherry Storm spending four panels receiving sophisticated fashion advice from a woman off-stage. In the final panel, she's revealed to be a homely scrubwoman as Sherry says, "Thanks so much for your advice, Amy...I don't know what I'd do without you!" To which the scrubwoman, wielding mop and bucket, tells her, "That's OK, kid...any time!" I remember, as a nine-year old, feeling there was more than a little philosophical food for thought there.



Della Vision #1 (Apr 1955).

One of the showgirls was Pearl Dimly, "America's Darling Dimwit" who also had her own short-lived title. Lee, DeCarlo and Hartley did some rollicking stuff with that strip. Talk about really, really bad blonde jokes! The other showgirls were Sherry's rival Chili Seven, Sherry's roommate Hazel Hale and, of course, Millie the Model, all of whom worked at the Silver Slipper nightclub. Millie's own title thankfully survived the Marvel implosion along with Patsy Walker's three titles. ☜

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THE Greatest COMIC BOOK ever!

(well...for this month at least)

by Mark Squirek

Few people have an easy time with their own identity. The struggle for a self-image can be overwhelming. There are some belief systems in this world that are based solely on the idea that our only real purpose is to find out who we are and then move on to the next plane of existence. This journey to discovery is what links so many together despite their differences.

This is why *Fantastic Four* #51 ranks with the finest. Sure, there is the usual apocalyptic battle, the life threatening danger, the bully in the cafeteria, but the story is about two men on parallel roads to self-discovery.

The first, The Thing, is lost in a morose sea of doubt. He questions everything, his appearance, his relationships and his reason for living. The second, strangely enough, wants exactly what The Thing has—power and fame. To the second traveler, the appearance of The Thing is immaterial. Once he has what The Thing so desperately questions, he will be complete.

Or so he thinks.

The full splash page of The Thing standing alone on a city street being pelted by a torrential downpour is almost the exact opposite of everything Jack Kirby is celebrated for. There is no massive action and there is no movement. If you look at this page for very long, you can hear the rain and nothing else. It is one man looking out to humanity asking for a reason.

What makes Kirby so special is shown over the first three pages. This story is taking place immediately after the massive Galactus Trilogy in *Fantastic Four* #48, 49 and 50. That was a Galaxy-spanning saga that, 30 years later, still reverberates throughout the Marvel Universe. The splash page quickly establishes us back on Earth and takes the focus from everything possible right down to one man. Over the next two pages, Kirby tightens the focus by increasing the number of panels until we feel claustrophobic.

As they work together on a machine that would stop the next attack by someone like Galactus, a scientist who has assumed the identity of The Thing becomes closer to Reed Richards, leader of the Fantastic Four, intent on revenge. He starts to see that Reed is not the man he thought he was. Consumed by jealousy over Reed Richard's success, this unnamed scientist has been blinded to the selflessness of Reed's struggle.

After some incredible soul searching, the unnamed scientist finally comes to grips with his own weakness and petty jealousies. Realizing the folly of his obsession, he makes the right choice and helps Reed Richards achieve his goal by making the ultimate sacrifice, giving his own life so that Reed can return to the proper dimension. In the end, no one knows who the Imposter Thing really was. After struggling so long for his identity, he finds it in his sacrifice and ironically, sacrifices his identity.

Jack Kirby and Stan Lee take the issue of identity to another member of the Four by having the Human Torch meet the campus sports hero in the Kozy Kampus Koffee Shop. The sports hero turns out to be a tremendous bully.

Even though this is just a quick, three-page digression from the action of the main story, it stays within the issue's thematic framework of identity. By placing so much emphasis on the interaction between the Torch and the bully and then the coach, it even adds the idea of one's responsibility in a social situation. The Human Torch's restraint is admirable and speaks of a different struggle than that of The Thing.

Any comment about Kirby's artwork ultimately fails because it really has to be seen to be understood. The full-page illustration on page 14 is a combination of geodesic domes, circles, photo-realism, planets and waves; Kirby has a field day showing us the inside of what no one has ever seen.

I haven't forgotten Stan Lee. Take away the bluster, the carney huckster, the showman; and there was a real writer. You and I know that others may have shaped certain aspects of what was going on, but it was going on because he saw it. It was going on because he heard it in his head a certain way.

If finding your identity leaves you stranded on a rock in an unknown dimension, then that may be what it takes.

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Jack Kirby's pencil re-creation of Amazing Fantasy #15.

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1942 Tarzan Sunday page hand-colored by Burne Hogarth.

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Exploring Space with Gil Kane

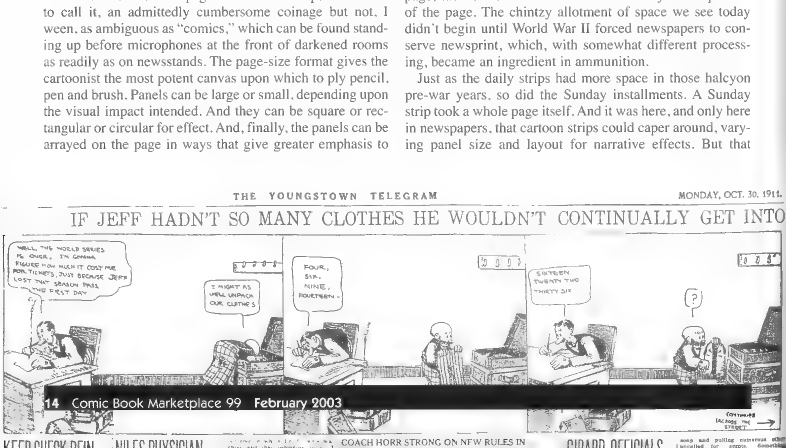
The artistry of cartooning, the deployment of pictures yoked to words for narrative purposes, can be best committed with the most satisfaction for both cartoonist and observer in the comic book form—that is, in the form of the "paginated cartoon strip," as I'd like to call it, an admittedly cumbersome coinage but not, I ween, as ambiguous as "comics," which can be found standing up before microphones at the front of darkened rooms as readily as on newsstands. The page-size format gives the cartoonist the most potent canvas upon which to ply pencil, pen and brush. Panels can be large or small, depending upon the visual impact intended. And they can be square or rectangular or circular for effect. And, finally, the panels can be arrayed on the page in ways that give greater emphasis to one or another of the story elements. All the basic aspects of the art form—narrative breakdown, panel composition and layout—are more likely to receive dramatic enhancement on pages than in strips.

The newspaper cartoon strip is, in comparison, a cramped and ornery contrivance. The possibilities for deviation from the rigidity of the strip form are limited. Panels can be wider or narrower; there can be more of them or fewer, depending upon how wide each one is. But that's about it. For the cartoonist, as Will Eisner once observed, doing a newspaper cartoon strip is like conducting an orchestra in a phone booth.

It was not always so. In the infancy of the newspaper strip, neither newspapers nor strips had adopted a standard format. Variation, we may suppose, abounded. Bud Fisher's *Mutt and Jeff* sometimes appeared as a single, large vertical panel rather than in strip format. And occasionally (on October 30, 1911 for instance), the strip ran across the tops of two facing pages—a "double length" strip. (The notation in the last panel on the first page read, "continued across the street," with an arrow pointing in that direction.)

Eventually, this kind of horseplay disappeared. Newspaper editors and press lords generally did not long tolerate cartoonists' fooling around with format. They had to conform like everyone else in the paper. But cartoon strips continued to enjoy a generous allowance of space. Typically, through the 1930s and into the 1940s, strips were published almost page-wide, usually at the top of the page. Even in newspapers that ganged strips all together on one page, the horizontal dimension was usually three-quarters of the page. The chintzy allotment of space we see today didn't begin until World War II forced newspapers to conserve newsprint, which, with somewhat different processing, became an ingredient in ammunition.

Just as the daily strips had more space in those halcyon pre-war years, so did the Sunday installments. A Sunday strip took a whole page itself. And it was here, and only here in newspapers, that cartoon strips could caper around, varying panel size and layout for narrative effects. But that


THE YOUNGSTOWN TELEGRAM
MONDAY, OCT. 30, 1911.
IF JEFF HADN'T SO MANY CLOTHES HE WOULDN'T CONTINUALLY GET INTO
WELL, THE WORLD SERIES IS OVER, I'M GONNA FIGURE HOW MUCH IT COST ME FOR TICKETS, JUST BECAUSE JEFF LOST THAT SEASON PASS THE FIRST DAY
I MIGHT AS WELL UNPACK OUR CLOTHES
FOUR, SIX, NINE, FOURTEEN
SIXTEEN TWENTY TWO THIRTY SIX
?
CONTINUED INCASE THE STREET
KEEP QUICK-DEAL
MILES DIVISIONAL
COACH HORR STRONG ON NEW RULES IN
CUDAHY OFFICIALS

license, too, was revoked in wartime. And newspaper cartoon strips on Sundays assumed the same rigid, non-deviating format as the dailies—with the exception, briefly, of Bill Watterson's *Calvin and Hobbes* in the year or so before he retired the strip, and himself.

Apart from *Calvin and Hobbes* in its latter-day Sundays, there has been only one shining example in the last half of the century of the dramatic potential of cartoon strip layout. And that was *Star Hawks*.

WHAT SORT OF FUNNY BUSINESS HAS BEEN OCCURING AT THE HOTEL MAXIMUS, ALICE K.?
A COUPLE OF KEY DIPLOMATS DISAPPEARED WHILE STAYING THERE . .
. . AND I'M CERTAIN AT LEAST ONE ERASE ONE HIS MIND ALTERED!
COULD BE A PRETTY BIG CONSPIRACY. ANY IDEA WHO'S BEHIND IT?
THAT'S WHAT WE HAVE TO FIND OUT, REX!
WOW! EVEN THOUGH EVIL DOINGS AND VAST CONSPIRACIES ARE MAYBE AWAITING US. . .
. . I'M GOING TO ENJOY THIS PLACE!
GOOD
GIL KANE
9-24

Here, Kane used half the strip's space to introduce us to Hotel Maximus, a space station spa and resort. The design of this day's strip is unabashedly attention grabbing. On the average page of newspaper comics, the two-tier height of Kane's panels would stand out—and the vast final panel, with the hotel etched against the black backdrop of space, would scream for a reader's attention. But such use of space is more than just visually riveting: graphic portrayal of the strip's setting and atmosphere gives the adventure story its authenticity, its reality. And Kane times the action, too—giving us our first view of Hotel Maximus as a concluding visual crescendo for the day.

Star Hawks was drawn by Gil Kane and written by Ron Goulart, who created the feature. It ran for only four-and-a-half years (October 3, 1977-May 2, 1981), but it was the most imaginative innovation in the newspaper strip since adventure stories invaded the funnies. Goulart furnished fast-moving stories, crisp and economical scripting, and more than an occasional flash of humor. This alone made *Star Hawks* almost unique among its fellows, whose stories so frequently must plod humorlessly along through unending forests of verbiage. But *Star Hawks*' toehold near the pinnacle of note-worthy comic strips is best secured by its graphic treatment.

In format, *Star Hawks* was a two-tier strip—it occupied the space normally filled by a stack of two daily strips. The notion of a double-decker strip was Flash Fairfield's, Director of Comic Art for the Newspaper Enterprise Association syndicate. Fairfield began toying with the idea of a space adventure strip in the summer of 1976. The double-truck format he saw as a way of putting life back into the adventure continuity strip.

"Basically, we felt that continuity strips would never make it the way they've been presented in recent years," Fairfield recalled in *Cartoonist Profiles*: "they just don't have enough space. But with the success of TV [serial] specials such as *Roots*; *Rich Man, Poor Man*; and so on, we figured we could get back into the comic sections and demand more space. If we got more room in which to operate, then we could show newspaper editors how exciting a continuity could be if it had this extra space, and could demonstrate to them that readers would be receptive to the idea."

When space wasn't, apparently, at a premium, Bud Fisher's **Mutt and Jeff** occasionally ran two pages wide.

MONDAY, OCT. 30, 1911. THE YOUNGSTOWN TELEGRAM

TROUBLE LOSING THINGS - - - - - - - - - - - - - - BY "BUD" FISHER

FORTY SIX! $46 DOLLARS AND DOE IT COST ME $ BY BECAUSE THAT LITTLE SIMP LOST HE PASS FIRST
?
?
LOOK MUTT I AINT SUCH A DOG AFTER ALL I JUST FOUND OUT FROM TH THE WORLD REMAIN IN MY WHITE VEST.
FRAME IT!

RAKER'S ALREADY GOT YER STAR HAWK BUDDIES!
AND I'M GONNA MANHANDLE YOUSE, CHAVEZ!!
ON THE CONTRARY!
GONNA GRAB YER...
OOPS!
C'MON AN' TAKE YER MEDICINE, CURLY!
OKAY, TUX, OLD BOY!
NOW, HERE'S MY TRUSTY GADJSUN!
DAVE KANE

As Space Hawk Chavez ends his encounter with the giant robot, Tux, the strip's ample format permits Kane to time the action with cinematic precision. Kane uses this layout frequently: the first panel, two tiers high, establishes the scene for the day's action, which subsequently unfolds in a double deck of conventional panel boxes. The first panel here plunges us immediately into the fray. Although this day's story is told chiefly in visual terms, the dialogue, spare as it is, adds essential qualities to the episode. Tux's opening remarks remind us of other story elements (Raker's capture of other Star Hawks) and make it clear that he isn't lunging at Chavez in order to embrace him lovingly. Much of the remaining dialogue preserves the flip personalities of the combatants, while Chavez's remark in panel three blends with the action depicted to clarify his objective. Finally, the entire sequence is superbly paced for maximum dramatic impact in the concluding panel.

Fairfield ran into Goulart, found out he was a science-fiction writer, read and liked some of Goulart's books and stories, and eventually enlisted him to write the new strip. It was an inspired choice: not only was Goulart an sf writer of years' experience, he was a collector and fan of comics and author of numerous books on the medium. Goulart knew and understood comics, and the *Star Hawks* stories reflected his thorough grasp of the form's nuances. Goulart contacted friend and neighbor Kane, and the creative team for *Star Hawks* was born.

Kane was as inspired a choice as Goulart. The two-tier format of the strip opened up possibilities that would be most apparent to someone accustomed to the more expansive format of the paginated form. And Kane was more than a little accustomed.

Kane had done his first comic book work around 1941 at about 16 years of age. He worked in the Binder Shop and the Baily Shop. He worked as Kirby's assistant. In the forties, he drew for MLJ, Street and Smith, Marvel, National, Quality, Hillman, Eastern Color, Fawcett, Fox, Holyoke and Prize. He drew the Scarlet Avenger, Red Hawk, Vision, Young Allies, Sandman, Wildcat and others.

In the fifties and sixties, Kane worked for Marvel and National. Avon, Harvey, King, Dell and Tower—drawing an assortment of characters that included Johnny Thunder, Captain Comet, Nighthawk, Dan Foley, Trigger Twins, Hopalong Cassidy, Don Caballero, Plastic Man, Batman, Flash Gordon, Laramie, Hennesey, Frogmen, Noman and Undersea Agent.

He helped launch the so-called Silver Age of super-hero comic books. For the second of the Golden Age super-heroes that Julie Schwartz rejuvenated in the late 1950s, Green Lantern, Kane designed a streamlined capeless costume. "I was trying for a balance between power and lyricism," Kane said, "—a cape would have gotten in the way of the figure." Kane also helped revive The Atom for the Silver Age.

Kane was clearly the artist for the assignment. And he, like most of his generation, had "studied" the newspaper strip work of such early masters as Harold Foster in *Prince Valiant*, Alex Raymond in *Flash Gordon* and Milton Caniff in *Terry and the Pirates*. He grew up on newspaper adventure strips in the pre-war years when they occupied lavish amounts of space. And he, like many of his contemporaries, aspired to doing a newspaper strip. *Star Hawks* was a dream come true.

"My original title of the strip," Goulart said, "was *Star Cops*. But Flash and some of the others [at NEA] didn't like the title. It was felt that *Star Cops* was too corny." This is from the syndicate that offered *Alley Oop*. "Gil and I had been fans of Basil Wolverton's *Spacehawk*," Goulart continued, "and we figured *Star Hawks* would be okay.

"We soon realized," Goulart went on, "that because of its unique size, our strip had to have a look of its own. What we were providing was the equivalent of a full comic book page every day. Gil decided not to pile two dailies on top of each other but to break up his space in much more effective ways."

Speaking at a comics convention in Boston several years before, Kane had distinguished comic book art from comic strip art. In comic book art, he is reported as saying,

"nobody is ever doing anything except in action; in strip art, nobody is ever doing anything except not in action." The "non-action" in newspaper strips may be more naturalistic than comic book action. Kane observed; but comic strips are undeniably less lively than comic books. In transferring the comic book page to the newspaper, Kane hoped to import with the format "all of the vitality and the thrust that you get on a comic book page because it has the room and because it deals in romance and fantasy which the newspapers abandoned long ago." And as *Star Hawks* took shape, Kane's hopes were realized.

BLAST IT!
THEY'VE TAKEN OUT FALLMIER... AND NOW NORLEANS!
GONNA TO HAVE TO DO A BETTER JOB OF STUNNING THEM!
GOT TO RISK AN EXPOSED POSITION...
G.R.L. I DON'T THINK THAT'S TOO WISE
WHAM!
SEE WHAT I MEAN?
KANE
© 1978 by NEA, Inc.

Repeatedly, Kane demonstrated the function of layout in dramatizing action. Here, the horizontal thrust of the opening panel emphasizes the force of the blow that fells Rex's buddy Norleans.

In its unprecedented expansive format, the strip afforded Kane the space a high adventure story needs. Varying panel size and layout from day to day, as I point out in a book of mine (*The Art of the Comic Book*), Kane broke old molds for newspaper strips. His panels slashed vertically through the two-tier space allotment, and Kane filled the large panels with exotic scenery and complex machinery and crowds of fighting men. With this much elbowroom, Kane could create and sustain an authentic futuristic atmosphere for Goulart's stories.

According to Kane, he and Goulart collaborated in a way that resembled the Marvel Method: "Ron brings in a storyline that consists of, say, the two main characters ending up on a prison farm. We sit down and spend an evening and work out a continuity about a prison farm. Then I work out the entire continuity [the breakdowns], day by day, on typing paper. Then Ron writes the copy in, and I use that as a basis for my drawing."

Kane was most comfortable with this approach—it permitted him to contribute to the story. "I'm trying to create not a plot line," he once said, "but a line on which to hang dramatic sequences that reveal character and motivate the plot line."

These story conferences were, given Kane's propensity for talk and his wide-ranging interest in cartooning, usually rambling affairs, consuming hours and hours.

"The way we worked," Goulart told Daniel Herman (in *Gil Kane: Art and Interviews*), "—which took up so much time—was to sit around at Gil's and talk over everything.... Eventually, we'd get around to *Star Hawks*. I'd have a synopsis of what was going to happen over the next couple of weeks, and we'd break it down into dailies—and a couple of Sunday pages. Gil would do a very rough sketch of each strip. I'd take those home and write the copy. After the syndicate approved the scripts, Gil would do a set of thumbnails, then blow them up and draw each strip [on a lightbox].

"The story and dialogue were mine," Goulart explained, "but the actual staging was a collaboration. Gil's input was usually on how the story was told, not what was said. And we kicked around ideas for characters. Gil was always enormously conscious of staging. We devoted a great amount of time to the timing—and how you went from one scene to another."

And throughout, Kane's distinctive graphic style—a crisp, almost brittle, line of unvarying width, whose delicate delineations are sharpened and made emphatic by liberal use of strategically placed solid blacks. Kane's style contrasts what he calls "geometric" and "organic" qualities. The geometric line "drops precipitously and brilliantly from one point to another and actually accents the shape by being natural and geometric. A geometric illustrator, for example, makes fingers squarer—but always with the idea of evolving the shape, the silhouette."

"I'm greatly attracted to that style because it was the first ordered quality I could impose on what I thought was an aimless style," Kane explained during an interview with Will Eisner. "Now that I'm older, I have a tendency to like natural forms. I like lines that constantly come in contact with all the subtle forms of anatomy—the head, the nose. If you draw as delicately and nuanced as possible, those forms that are so satisfying in the way they're pulled together, rolled together, make new forms—I call that an organic line, one that accommodates all sorts of natural qualities in the

NOW WE'LL SEE IF ALL THOSE LESSONS AT THE MARSPORT'Y WERE WORTH IT.
A SHAME TO LOSE TWO OF THEM. SHALL WE...
NO, THEY'RE BEYOND SAVING.
GIVE GOULART
© 1978 by NEA, Inc.

Vertical panels dramatize the height from which Rex and his cohort dive.

figure. Somewhere in between the strength and power that the geometric line gives you and the lyrical quality that the organic line gives you is what I feel I want for myself."

In *Star Hawks*, we see clearly Kane's stylistic objectives being realized: the rounded, flowing forms of the human figure are in stark contrast to the flat planes of space machinery and buildings. But even in the human figures, balled knots of muscle, sinew and bone take geometric shapes as they also mesh together to define the natural forms of anatomy in motion.

Stylistic achievement aside, Kane's signal accomplishment in *Star Hawks* lays in the manner in which he exploited the potential of his strip's novel format. To see some of the ways he did it, inspect a few of the strips from 1978 arrayed in this vicinity; in them, we'll encounter the "space cops," Rex Jaxan and, perhaps, his flamboyant sidekick Chavez.

In strips like these, Kane gives us impressive demonstration of the storytelling potential of comics art. Not since the thirties had an adventure strip been afforded the sort of room that permits this kind of storytelling—the kind that displays the best of which the medium is capable.

The National Cartoonists Society recognized Kane's newspaper strip achievement with a silver plaque for best story strip in 1977—as it had his work in comic books with similar awards in 1971, 1972, and 1975.

But after a couple years in the sun, *Star Hawks* faded. Partly, the very ambitiousness of the project contributed to its downfall. Kane, who tried to keep up his commitments with Marvel while also doing the strip, began to fall behind.

Said Goulart: "Doing *Star Hawks* was equivalent to drawing seven Sunday pages every damn week. Even with his wife, Elaine, putting in the blacks and other people helping out, it was an enormous amount of work. I can remember a couple of times driving with Elaine to the airport to get the artwork on the plane [to the syndicate office in Cleveland]. It was snowing, and we'd be skidding on the road, like trying to get the serum to the Eskimos. We finally lost all thirteen of our Canadian papers because the proofs weren't getting there on time. We'd get the stuff to Cleveland on time, but then the Cleveland airport would be shut down because of weather, and nothing would get through to Canada. You run a two-tier blank [on your comics page] a few days, and you decide it's better to cancel and try some new, speedier strips."

Other conspiracies didn't help. NEA moved to New York, and Fairfield elected Cleveland and opted out. A new editor, a former Marvel factotum named Bobbie Miller, liked Goodwin better than Goulart and started maneuvering to get Goulart off the feature. (That Goulart was the creator of the feature made no difference to her, apparently.) Then in late 1978, Kane went into the hospital with gallbladder problems and took a long time to recuperate. Until he returned to the drawing board in March 1979, other hands took over the strip's artwork, which began looking "not as impressive as it had," Goulart said.

After losing a couple big paper subscribers, editor Miller blamed Goulart's stories instead of the indifferent art and replaced him with Archie Goodwin. Meanwhile, other sf strips started to surface—*Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, both in the traditional single-tier format. By the summer of 1979, NEA surrendered to the inevitable: beginning July 30, *Star Hawks* appeared on a single tier. Two years later, it was over.

"I think Gil was pleased with the reaction the strip got from his peers and fans," Goulart told me recently. "Winning an NCS award cheered him up a good deal. However, Gil seemed so committed to turning out as much work as he could for other markets—Marvel and others—that he really didn't get around to sitting back and enjoying the accolades. If *Star Hawks* had taken off like *Garfield*, he might have been able to enjoy the experience more. The main problem was that it didn't bring in a sufficient income for him."

Kane was getting about five times the income Goulart was from the feature, but it wasn't enough to live on—he needed the other work from Marvel and elsewhere.

"He did a terrific job," Goulart said, "but impressive art—not to mention brilliant scripting—is not a guarantee of success."

Not in the realm of the newspaper cartoon strip.

In retrospect, *Star Hawks* looked like a doomed enterprise from the start. Any paper that subscribed had to drop two strips to make room for it. And that invariably riles readers to whom the dropped strip represents an old friend of the family. No editor likes to court reader outrage. And in adding *Star Hawks*, the raging readers would be twice the usual number and therefore twice as loud in protesting. Who needs it?

The earliest existence of the strip was as doubtful as its ending was undistinguished. *Star Hawks* had a successful launch only after months languishing in the syndicate pending file. "Adventure strips were dying out by then," Goulart remembered.

Kane and Goulart had turned in their initial batch of completed work late in 1976. Until the *Star Wars* movie came out in May 1977, no one at the syndicate thought an sf strip would appeal to newspaper editors. With the stunning success of George Lucas' film, everyone wanted space opera. And Fairfield dug out *Star Hawks*, and the strip, considering the havoc that adding it created for newspaper editors, had a remarkable debut—in 40 or 50 papers, Goulart recalled.

The success of the strip, brief but brilliant, was probably due more to the fluke of the Lucas connection than to the skill and dedication of Kane and Goulart. And I mean no denigration of either in saying that. I doubt that any amount of graphic or storytelling genius could have sustained the strip for very long over the entrenched prejudice against cartoon strips that the newspaper industry inadvertently fosters.

We should be grateful that *Star Hawks* graced the funnies pages for as long as it did, proving, as if it needed to be proven, the dramatic potential of the form. The proof may not have been needed, but it's satisfying to realize that it was achieved in such a spectacular and memorable way. We may not see its like again—until, perhaps in the not too distant future, newspapers are reduced to being vehicles for carrying grocery store coupons to consumers and need something to separate one page of ads from another. Then syndicated features, including cartoon strips, will come into their own once again.

ALICE K'S INFORMANT IS DEAD AND...
THEY'RE ONLY ROBOTS. NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.
GROWRR
MIKE BAUER
UNLESS THEY HAD SOME THING TO DO W.TH HIS DEATH
BACK, FELLAS!
YOU'RE JUST PART OF THE DECOR, REMEMBER?

The opening horizontal panel blends word and picture for dramatic impact: we begin, as readers always do, at the left, where we see Alice K, Rex's boss (and the woman of his heart) pondering the whereabouts of Lanzer, and then, as we read on to the right, the picture becomes revelation, telling us, and Alice K, where Lanzer is.

THIS IS OUR REMODELING JUNGLE FLOOR!
TERRIBLY POPULAR WITH OUR SPORTSMEN GUEST!
STEP OUT AND LOOK AROUND, BOYS...
...YOU'LL FIND IT ABSOLUTELY FASCINATING!
WONDER WHAT KIND OF WILDLIFE ABOUNDS HEREABOUTS.
HERE COMES THE ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION, CHAVEZ.
ZAM!
MIKE BAUER

Kane went beyond simple horizontal and vertical emphases, however. Here, he slices up his space to create the odd-shaped last panel, a shape that permits him to underscore the relative sizes of the heroes and the wildlife.

Marvel Comics 1965
The Year of Transition

BY NICHOLAS CAPUTO

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Caputo's "The Marvel Method: Forgotten Struggles in the Formative Years (Marvel Comics 101) was published in Comic Book Marketplace *81 in September of 2002—unfortunately not one of our available back issues.*

IN THE HALLOWED NAME OF ASGARD-- BY THE GLORY OF THE ETERNAL BRIDGE--I GRANT THEE FAIR WINDS AND CLOUDLESS SKIES--SO LONG AS YE VOYAGE THRU MY DOMAIN!
THUS, THE GREAT SHIP-- SUCH AS NO MORTAL EYES HAVE EVER BEHELD--TAKES TO THE AIR-- GUIDED BY THE ENDLESS CURRENTS OF SPACE--!!
SAIL ON! WE SHALL NE'ER RETURN TILL WE HAVE FOUND, AND BESTED THE FORCES OF EVIL! SAIL ON-- IN THE NAME OF ODIN, THE ALL-WISE!!
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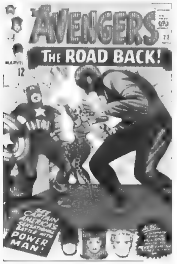
Starting off with *The Avengers*, issue 15 (Apr 1965) marked a turning point in the series, as the original members (Thor, Iron Man, Ant-Man and The Wasp) took their leave from the strip. Writer/editor Stan Lee chose to revamp the line-up in the next issue, although, surprisingly, this was apparently not due to poor sales. Thor, Iron Man, Giant-Man and The Wasp had been featured in their own strips for some time; it seems that Lee chose to drop the characters so he could maintain a more realistic continuity. It has also been stated that he wanted to prove he could sell the book with a cast of unknowns. Captain America, apparently a popular character, would remain on as a link to the strip's past, but Lee avoided continuity headaches by centering his solo exploits in WWII, freeing Lee to focus on his current life in *The Avengers*. The rookies Lee corralled were familiar protagonists from the pages of earlier Marvel strips: Hawkeye was introduced in *Iron Man*; Quicksilver and The Scarlet Witch were reluctant foes of the X-Men.



#22 (November 1965)

Lee decided to try a new tack with the young members. Hawkeye was placed center-stage, as the cynical, wisecracking marksman who took to ribbing the team's conservative and mature leader, Captain America. The colorful hero was obviously a favorite of Lee and Don Heck's, and he became more popular than the reserved Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver.

New characters such as the Swordsman (modeled after movie star Douglas Fairbanks) were introduced, and a strong sense of continuity was maintained with the rest of the Marvel line. An innovative cross-over with The Hulk used the same Kirby-drawn panels that had appeared in that month's Hulk strip on a number of pages (While the stories occurred concurrently, the participants never met.), and Captain America's interest in joining Nick Fury's agency tied in to the new strip in *Strange Tales*.

On the artistic side, Jack Kirby provided layouts for issues 14-16, with Don Heck penciling all but issue 16 (Dick Ayers filled in.). Inkers included Dick Ayers, Mike Esposito, Chic Stone, John Romita and even Wally Wood. The wide array of inkers made for an unstable mixture, and it would remain so until Heck began inking his own pencils (in 1966). Stan Lee penned all the stories with the exception of #14, which was scripted by Larry Leiber and Larry Ivie. (Under the pen name Paul Laiken. Ivie went on to develop an interesting magazine, *Monsters and Heroes*, for a short time in the '60s.) Lee and Heck, with a more limited group of heroes, produced a fairly entertaining series.

The year 1965 was a transitional period for Marvel Comics. While the early years were spent testing the waters, by 1965 Stan Lee was becoming increasingly aware of creative and financial potential. It was a year when some of comic's finest craftsmen would converge, leaving an indelible mark on the medium. As a company, Marvel Comics would experience both high and low periods in the future, but the combination of originality, craft and enthusiasm would never be quite so magical again. By examining the books in detail, I hope to give a perspective on what made that year so special.

There were some noteworthy events in the pages of "The most unusual teen-agers of all," as Lee subtitled *The X-Men*. Initially produced under the aegis of Lee, Kirby and inker Chic Stone, they re-invented a character that first appeared in the pages of *Marvel Comics* #1 in 1939 (the first "Marvel," then called Timely). Ka-Zar, the ruler of a lost world, debuted in *X-Men* #10 (Mar 1965) and was "inspired" by the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs (Tarzan in particular), as well as the less-talkative Johnny Weismuller Tarzan popularized by a series of movies in the 1930s and '40s. Issue 11 introduced The Stranger, an otherworldly being who succeeded in doing what The X-Men couldn't for ten issues: Eliminating the menace of Magneto and his evil mutants, whom the fans (and probably Lee and Kirby) were rapidly tiring of. The Stranger typified the ambiguous, overwhelmingly powerful character that would soon be a

#10 (March 1965)

#14 (November 1965)

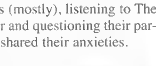
mainstay at Marvel.

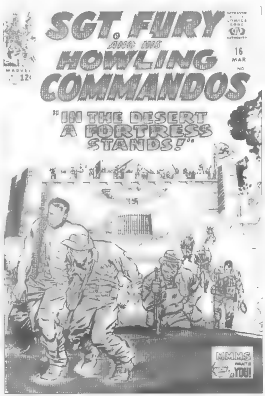
By issue 12, Chic Stone was gone, but Kirby continued as "layout artist," which I sincerely doubt explained his true purpose. It was around this time that Lee used Kirby in this manner on strips such as Avengers, Daredevil, Captain America, The Hulk and S.H.I.E.L.D., over artists including Don Heck, John Romita, Dick Ayers, Werner Roth, John Severin and Bill Everett. Lee probably chose to put Kirby in this position for a number of very good reasons. With Kirby at the helm he could maintain a visual continuity and dynamic throughout the line. Kirby's layouts were also an easy way to teach others what Lee wanted in storytelling from both newcomers and old-timers (it could also be argued that this process submerged many individual art styles). Kirby probably worked the same way with Lee on these stories, since he wrote the details of the story within the borders of the pages (as I've seen on many original art pages). This would explain why so many concepts such as The Juggernaut and The Sentinels (which appeared in *The X-Men*), bore the Kirby imprint. Such innovations were usually absent when Kirby was out of the picture. Lee must be given his due as a shrewd businessman – he was able to maintain the Kirby look by turning him into a veritable one-man army.

The artists who followed Kirby were veterans. Alex Toth, who illustrated issue 12, had been in the business since the 1940s; his concise storytelling and use of blacks made him one of the most talented artists in the field. His solo outing was followed by Werner Roth, under the pen-name Jay Gavin; Roth was no stranger to Lee, having illustrated a number of series for Atlas in the '50s, including *Apache Kid* and *Lorna the Jungle Girl*. Roth's clean, simple style was subdued compared to Kirby's, but he had a knack for drawing average people and teenagers (which was a plus on this title).

Throughout the artistic changes, Lee remained in firm control of the written word. The Juggernaut story (issues 12-13) introduced Charles Xavier's half-brother, Cain Marko, who gained incredible powers through supernatural means. The story of Xavier's youth was fleshed out with melodramatic fervor. This was followed by the introduction of The Sentinels, powerful robots created with the intention to destroy all mutants. The teen heroes' persecution touched on fears of alienation that struck a resonant chord with their adolescent audience. Young boys (mostly), listening to The Beatles, growing their hair longer and questioning their parents, could relate to heroes who shared their anxieties.

Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos continued under Lee and Dick Ayers, focusing on the pseudo super-heroic exploits of the ethnically diverse World War II team. Issue 15 included a rare inking stint by Steve Ditko, whose unique style nearly overwhelmed Ayers pencils. Issue 16 led off with a stunning cover depicting The Howlers suffering in the sweltering desert heat. Jack Kirby, aided by inker Chic Stone and colorist Stan Goldberg (whose use of yellow and brown hues gave the scene a distinctive mood), brought the scene to life. Jack Kirby's real life experiences during World War II gave the scene depth.





#16 (March 1965)

While the Howlers' exploits usually followed a strict routine, there were occasional forays into more dramatic storylines, as was the case with issue 18's "Killed in Action." The splash page (penciled by an uncredited Jack Kirby) has Nick Fury preparing to propose to Pamela Hawley, the Red Cross worker who fell for the tough, streetwise sergeant. The Howlers try to dissuade Fury from going to Lord Hawley's estate, but he blissfully ignores their pleas. In a stunning sequence, Fury arrives at the estate and is told by Lord Hawley of his daughter's death while aiding victims of an air raid. The shock and

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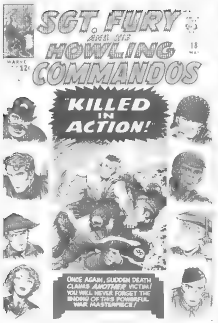
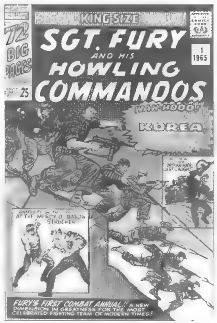

SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS
"KILLED IN ACTION!"
ONCE AGAIN, SUDDEN DEATH CLAIMS ANOTHER VICTIM! YOU WILL NEVER FORGET THE ENDING OF THIS EXCITING WAR MASTERPIECE!

#14 (November 1965)


KING SIZE
72 BIG PAGES
SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS
KOREA
FURY'S FIRST COMBAT ANNUAL! A NEW ADVENTURE-PACKED, ALL-STORY, CHARACTER-FILLED TREAT OF ACTION-THRILLS!

#14 (November 1965)

pain on Fury's face as he slowly drops the engagement ring to the floor is memorable. Jack Kirby also drew this sequence, presumably because Lee wanted to add an emotional punch to the ending. Lee and Kirby's words and pictures wove together seamlessly, creating a moment that transcended the material.

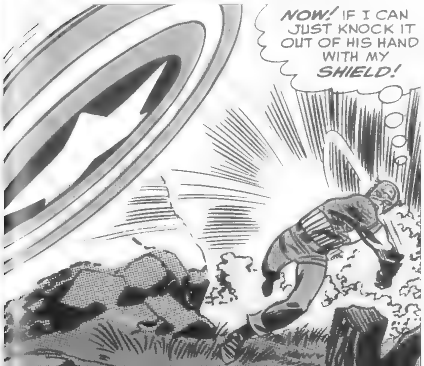
Likening the anthology books to a double-feature movie matinee (for those of us who remember such things) would not be too far a stretch of the imagination. *Tales of Suspense* starred Iron Man, with Stan Lee and Don Heck producing (inkers included Dick Ayers, Mike Esposito, Chic Stone, Vince Colletta and Wally Wood). Issue 61 (Jan 1965) began a two-part story featuring the origin of The Mandarin, an oriental menace in the tradition of Fu Manchu, bent on world domination (what else?). While it's been said his cover appearances did not raise sales, his frequent appearances make one question this. The team followed with a revised version of The Black Widow, who gained a costume and powers similar to Spider-Man, as well as a return of Hawkeye, leading into his inclusion in The Avengers two months later. Following a number of sub-standard stories, improvements in the strip began to take shape.

A new addition to the supporting cast was Senator Byrd, an authority figure in the J. Jonah Jameson/Thunderbolt Ross mold, who hounded the hero (in this case Tony Stark, whose invention of his alter-ego's armor was of vital interest to the government). Issue 69 introduced The Titanium Man, a Soviet counterpoint to Iron Man, in a three-part story. Lee once again played with themes of morality and self-sacrifice by having Happy Hogan risk his life to aid a desperate Iron Man. In a novel twist, Happy reveals to his boss that he was aware of his double-identity, giving at least one hero a rare friend that he could trust and confide in.

Captain America remained the back up in *Tales of Suspense*. After two fast-paced stories set in the present day, Lee and Kirby moved his exploits back to World War II. (What has not been widely noted is that these tales were literally lifted from stories that Kirby and co-creator Joe Simon produced in the 1940s. Although they had new dialogue by Lee, the basic plots and characters remained the same.) Jack Kirby outdid

TALES OF SUSPENSE
IRON MAN CAPTAIN AMERICA
THE ORIGIN OF THE MANDARIN!
BREAK-OUT IN CELL BLOCK TEN!
ALL-NEW THRILLS WITH TWO OF AMERICA'S GREATEST AVENGERS!

#62 (February 1965)



#66 (July 1965)

#69 (September 1965)

himself on the art, and with the re-introduction of The Red Skull the recycled stories segued into all-new plots, as Lee and Kirby revealed the Nazi's origin in a dramatic three-parter. The Skull was a German orphan who stole to survive on the streets of Germany. In a chance meeting with Hitler, he is singled out to become a symbol of the Nazi cause. The Red Skull mask completes the picture, an evocative symbol of anarchy and violence. The Red Skull was a perfect counterpoint to Captain America, and even in the watered-down pages under the Comics Code Kirby was able to suggest the character's immorality by his facial expressions alone. The Red Skull, both visually and dramatically, would continue to fascinate fans.

In association with superior inkers such as Frank Giacoia and Chic Stone, Kirby brought vitality to the strip. His dynamic action sequences and storytelling were rarely equaled, and his love of the character was apparent. Unfortunately, he would soon be pulled away from full-time duty (as of *Tales of Suspense* #69), continuing to lay out the book for Dick Ayers and George Tuska. Both did commendable jobs, Tuska in particular. Lee heralded Tuska as "one of the greats of the Golden Age of Comics," and he had indeed made a name for himself, notably in the crime titles of the 1950s. Tuska was then busy on the *Buck Rogers* comic strip, and would not return to full time duty until 1968.

A change occurred in the strips final 1965-dated issue, as World War II stories were replaced by present-day adventures. The transition occurred smoothly, with Cap narrating his final encounter with The Red Skull to his Avenger colleagues. That episode is connected with the new menace of The Sleepers, three mechanical creations which, when combined, would cause the destruction of the earth. Whatever Lee's reason for moving the stories into current continuity, the strips enthusiasm remained high.

Tales to Astonish, which starred Giant-Man, was rapidly running out of steam. After a few substandard stories by Human Torch originator Carl Burgos, veteran Bob Powell replaced him. Powell's pencils were particularly good, with a strong sense of perspective, but the plots remained aimless and weak, and Lee always seemed to be apologizing for the stories. Unlike many of his other characters, Lee couldn't seem to find a suitable niche for the character, in or out of costume. The strip was retired with issue #69 (Jul 1965), but, after a brief retirement, Lee found a spot for him back in The Avengers.

Tales to Astonish #70 led off with a familiar character: Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner. Lee, having revived the Human Torch (at least in name) and Captain America, had another go at the 1940s hero/villain. The story immediately followed his recent appearance in Daredevil (which may have been in preparation for a Wally Wood-drawn series, which never saw fruition). In "The Start of the Quest" Namor is an outcast in his homeland of Atlantis. The Warlord Krang is the new ruler, aided by Lady Dorma, who, spurned by Namor, betrays him to his enemy. The Sub-Mariner's search for Neptune's Trident sets the scene for his serial-like adventures, and under the team of Lee, Gene Colan (under the pen-name Adam Austin) and Vince Coletta was a step up from Giant-Man's stories. Gene Colan, who had been toiling away at DC (he was a veteran of Timely/Atlas, contributing to crime, horror and western strips) brought his fluid pencils, cinematic eye and expansive, offbeat panel arrangement to the strip, although Vince Colletta's inking watered (pardon!) his pencils down considerably. Lee's re-styling of Bill Everett's elemental char-

#63 (January 1965)

#64 (February 1965)

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#74 (December 1965)

#70 (August 1965)

acter never attained the popularity it had in the 1940s, nevertheless, the Sub-Mariner would continue to be an essential ingredient at Marvel in the 1960s.

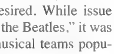
"The World's Greatest Adventure Serial," as Stan Lee bombastically described the Hulk strip, continued with the introduction of The Leader (*Astonish* #63, Jan 1965), a factory worker who became gamma-irradiated in a freak accident, turning his skin green and infusing him with abnormal intelligence. Using his mind as a weapon, he was a perfect counterpoint to the Hulk's brute strength. After battling Humanoids, invulnerable androids with malleable skin that were unable to be harmed, Banner is charged with treason and jailed. Rick Jones arranges a meeting with the President (it helps when you have an Avengers ID) and reveals Banner's secret to him. Banner is granted a reprieve, but is still under suspicion by General Ross and Major Talbot, and soon winds up behind the Iron Curtain. Plotting behind the scenes, The Leader attempts to discover the link between Banner and The Hulk. Stan Lee, in tandem with Steve Ditko (with unexceptional inking by George Roussous and Vince Colletta) moved the series at a serial-like pace. Unfortunately, Ditko would bow out with issue #69 (inked by the talented Frank Giacoia).

Jack Kirby returned to his co-creation as plotter and penciller, with Mike Esposito inking. The Leader finally captures The Hulk to study his powers. Banner is shot and presumed dead, but Rick Jones steals the body and saves his life by subjecting him to gamma radiation, resulting in a Hulk who retains the intelligence of Bruce Banner, but is unable to revert to human form, fearing the bullet wound would kill him. It was a novel idea, which Lee and Kirby did not fully explore. After three issues, Mike Esposito provided finished art (over Kirby layouts), but was thankfully replaced after two issues by the distinctive work of Bob Powell (Esposito continued as inker). The Leader finally removes the bullet from The Hulk's brain and, in return for this service, The Hulk has to travel to another planet to steal the "Ultimate Machine" for the green-skinned genius. The Watcher makes a guest-appearance, and The Hulk slowly reverts to a duller, brutish personality. After spending most of the series as the main protagonist, The Leader obtains the knowledge of the universe (which must fill up one hell of a lot of Encyclopedia Britannicas!!), and promptly drops dead. While the artistic shuffling caused some problems (the strip would be notorious for its revolving artists) the rapid pace kept it interesting.

#129 (Feb 1965)

#130 (Mar 1965)

Strange Tales, featuring The Human Torch (with The Thing as co-star) left a lot to be desired. While issue #130 promised the duo would "Meet the Beatles," it was only a poor attempt to cash in on the musical teams popularity. Carl Burgos penciled a few stories, followed by Bob Powell, but the convoluted story line could not be salvaged. Wally Wood's inking added a touch of elegance to their final tale (he may have requested the assignment; his interest in knights and castles, both featured in this story, was constant throughout his career). While The Human Torch strip might have sold well enough, it appears that Stan Lee wanted to try out some new ideas.



With the debut of Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. (*Strange Tales* #135, cover-dated Aug 1965), Lee and Kirby decided to bring their WWII hero into the modern world. The popularity of the secret agent blossomed with Ian Fleming's James Bond books, and escalated when Sean Connery played the character in a series of movies beginning in 1963. By 1965, spies had invaded the world of popular culture, notably on TV shows such as *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* Under the guidance of Lee and Kirby (or perhaps the suggestion of publisher Martin Goodman), the ingredients for an exciting (if derivative) series took shape.

Nick Fury was placed into super-hero continuity

a year earlier, when he fought alongside the Fantastic Four as a CIA operative. The response may have given Lee the idea to star Fury as the head of a high-tech government agency with the acronym S.H.I.E.L.D. (Supreme Headquarters International Espionage Law-Enforcement Division). Lee, coupled with Jack Kirby, had the opportunity to "Out-Bond Bond," as Kirby once put it. They were more than up for the challenge and the ideas came with explosive rapidity: A world-threatening menace with a suitably macabre name, Hydra; Life Model Decoys (artificial duplicates that could stand in for real agents); a dirigible-like headquarters in the sky named the Heli-Carrier; and a flying car which housed an array of gadgets (an idea later copied in the movie Back to the Future). Many of these concepts sprang from Jack Kirby's ever-percolating imagination. Lee may have brought in Tony Stark, as weapons inventor for S.H.I.E.L.D., to enrich the strips continuity. (The evidence points to this being a last-minute addition due to Stark's face obviously having been drawn by someone other than Kirby, and what appears to be re-lettered word balloons.)

#134 (Jul 1965)

#135 (Aug 1965)

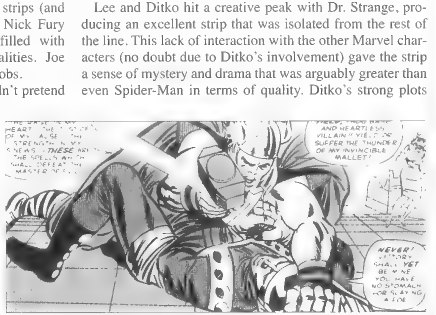
After penciling the initial tale, Kirby continued as layout artist. The Stan Lee splash page blurb in *Strange Tales* #136 accurately described John Severin as "that sensational stylist." Producing spectacular war stories for editor Harvey Kurtzman at EC Comics in the 1950s and creating superb caricatures in *MAD*, Severin later worked with Stan Lee on a plethora of superbly drawn war and western strips (and covers) for Atlas Comics. Severin's tenure on Nick Fury was a brief (but memorable) three issues, filled with detailed backgrounds and distinctive personalities. Joe Sinnott followed up with one of his last pencil jobs.

S.H.I.E.L.D. was a fast-moving series that didn't pretend to be anything other than what it was. It took on the secret agent genre with gusto, and Kirby's concepts were inventive. It stood several notches above the Torch and Thing series it replaced, and contrasted nicely with its fantasy-oriented co-feature.

The mystical adventures of Dr. Strange fairly dripped with mood, courtesy of Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, at perhaps the pinnacle of their respective talents. After a fill-in story by Golden Age writer/artist Don Rico, issue 130 began a serial that included the return of Dormammu, an ailing Ancient One, and Baron Mordo and his disciples hunting Dr. Strange, a fugitive taking refuge in the streets of Hong Kong. Ditko had Strange attired in a blue suit (which may have been a nod to Will Eisner's Spirit, a strip he apparently admired) throughout most of the story. Ditko's ability to depict both mundane city streets and otherworldly dimensions with equal vigor gave the strip an unusual flavor. A brief stop to "A Nameless Land, A Timeless Time" took the magician to a fairy tale world ruled by an evil sorceress (the weird looking, expressive pet Ditko designed was another treat).

Dr. Strange returned to earth in the following story, beginning a quest for "Eternity." Behind the scenes, Clea, an alien woman Strange had met before, assists the sorcerer by freeing the Mindless Ones (gray-skinned creatures who exist only to fight), preventing Dormammu from helping Mordo. Issue 135 was the first time Ditko was given credit for plotting as well as drawing the stories, as he had been doing anonymously for some time (the change was reportedly at Ditko's insistence, and it was concurrent with the Spider-Man issues he was producing). Dr. Strange's quest for the meaning of Eternity takes him to London, leading to a confrontation with a demon (Ditko once again uses the concept of masks and concealment as a metaphor) and finally into the very mind of the Ancient One to unearth the secret of Eternity and save his aged mentor. In issue 138, Dr. Strange finally faces Eternity, a Godlike being composed of the universe, who assumes the shape of man. Ditko took a full-page panel to introduce the character—a device he used sparingly—and followed with large panels to depict Eternity's overwhelming presence. The year ended with Strange confronting both Mordo and Dormammu.

Lee and Ditko hit a creative peak with Dr. Strange, producing an excellent strip that was isolated from the rest of the line. This lack of interaction with the other Marvel characters (no doubt due to Ditko's involvement) gave the strip a sense of mystery and drama that was arguably greater than even Spider-Man in terms of quality. Ditko's strong plots


NEVER! I STOP... SHALL YET BE MINE! YOU HAVE NO STOMACH FOR A LONG AND HEARTLESS VILLAINY! YIELD... OR SUFFER THE THUNDER OF MY INVINCIBLE MALLET!
NEVER! I STOP... SHALL YET BE MINE! YOU HAVE NO STOMACH FOR A LONG

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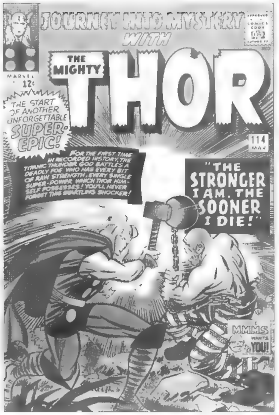
#112 (January 1965)


JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY
WITH
THE MIGHTY
THOR
114
THE START OF ANOTHER UNFORGETTABLE SUPER-EPIC!
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MUCH-TOLD HISTORY, THE TITANIC THUNDER GOD BATTLES A DEADLY FOE EQUAL TO HIS OWN STRENGTH...EVEN MORE! WHICH TRICK WON...AND WHICH TRICK LOST...YOU'LL NEVER FORGET THIS BRUTALLY SHOCKER!
"THE STRONGER I AM, THE SOONER I DIE!"
MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS YOU!

#114 (March 1965)

and innovative art were an inspiration to Lee, who countered with some of his best writing. The dark, muted colors of Stan Goldberg added additional flavor. Comfortably nestled behind the gung-ho adventures of S.H.I.E.L.D., Lee and Ditko attained a level of sophistication that the medium has rarely risen to. In less then a year Steve Ditko would leave the pages of *Strange Tales* forever, but his contributions would remain a high water mark for the series in general, and comics in particular.

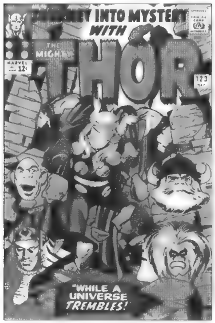
The Mighty Thor, starring in *Journey into Mystery*, blended the worlds of fantasy and myth, courtesy of Lee, Kirby and inker Chic Stone, beginning with a battle between Thor and The Hulk (*JIM* #112, Jan 1965). The splash page depicted a group of kids arguing over which character was stronger (a discussion that took place in real life all the time). Lee, in particular, was aware of the fans' interests in Marvel's heroes occupying one distinctive world, and Kirby and Stone brought excitement and vitality to the story. The Grey Gargoyle, whose touch turned objects into stone, returned in a story that had Don Blake reveal his identity to nurse Jane Foster, the woman he loved. While there were no afterefJOURNEY INTO MYSTERY WITH THOR

fects (Odin took Thor's powers away, leading Jane to think Don was lying) it played up the father/son conflict that was essential to the strip. Convict Crusher Creel gains the power to absorb the qualities of anything he touches (with help from the mystic powers of Loki), becoming The Absorbing Man. Dressed in prison stripes and carrying a ball and chain, the coarse, guttural Creel contrasted perfectly with the noble, majestic Thor. Reporter Harris Hobbs was an example of an ordinary person involved in extraordinary circumstances; an idea that Jack Kirby would make use of throughout his career.

Lee and Kirby's canvas grew more expansive each issue, beginning with "The Trial of the Gods," wherein Odin forces both his sons to face a dangerous contest after discovering Jane Foster in Asgard. Through treachery and deceit Loki wins the contest, leading Thor into another series of adventures to prove his innocence. A structural change in stories was taking place here and simultaneously in *Fantastic Four*. Plots wove one into the other with no real ending. Kirby seemed to hold sway in plotting these improvisational tales, but Lee held the reigns in when he felt it necessary (Lee would occasionally acknowledge in print—albeit jokingly—that a Kirby full page was decoration and did not progress the plot). This new format was quite different from their competitors' output of mostly self-contained tales with little continuity or characterization. Through trial, error or accident, Lee and Kirby stumbled upon a format that was distinctive.

The fast paced plots continued. The Destroyer, a creation of Odin's intended to protect the earth, falls into the hands of an evil human who brought the metal shell to life (once again, due to Loki's machinations). An interesting twist is Loki's realization that, if he succeeds in killing his half-brother, he would be found guilty and face Odin's wrath. Lee and Kirby give the character personality by his desperate attempts to awaken the All-Father from the "Odin-

MARVEL COMICS 102



#123 (December 1965)

#115 (April 1965)

Sleep," a ritual that he must undergo one day each year to remain immortal. Loki (who never learns from his mistakes) next plots to overthrow Asgard, sending The Absorbing Man to challenge Odin. Meanwhile, Jane Foster becomes the prisoner of a hooded man, revealed to be reporter Harris Hobbs. Using Jane to attract Thor, Hobbs photographs him changing into his mortal identity of Don Blake. The reporter attempts to blackmail the Thunder God in order to see the wonders of Asgard. Unfortunately for him, he gets his wish as they arrive in the midst of Odin's confrontation with The Absorbing Man. In the midst of all the excitement, little notice is taken of the lowly human who intrudes upon the scene. Man in an overwhelming, uncomprehending environment seemed to be a Jack Kirby touch, one he would go back to many times in his career.

The first *Journey into Mystery Annual* should have been a spectacular event, but with its lack of new material (due either to time or money constraints) it had little to offer. The new story (a scant 15 pages) mixes the worlds of Greek and Norse mythology as Thor stumbles into Olympus and encounters Hercules (Lee and Kirby were probably both aware of the character's popularity in numerous movies at the time, as portrayed by muscleman Steve Reeves, whose resemblance to their Hercules is obvious). While the story contained little beyond a formulaic fight between the characters, the brash, boastful personality of Hercules held promise and would play an integral part in future storylines. A two-page map of Asgard rounded off the new material.

"Tales of Asgard" five-page vignettes continued to enhance the back pages of *Journey into Mystery*. Lee and Kirby explored the world of epic fantasy with stories of Loki's and Thor's childhood, followed by a thinly veiled takeoff of Little Red Riding Hood. An ongoing quest (focusing on a giant sword that, if loosened from its scabbard, would cause the destruction of the Universe) took center stage. Odin enlists Loki and Thor, as well as a trio of characters who would play supporting roles in the strip for many years to come (*Journey into Mystery* #119). Hogun, a Hun-like warrior dressed in black; Fandral, a sword-wielding daredevil inspired by movie star Douglas Fairbanks; and Volstagg, whose tremendous girth and blustering bravado owed much to Shakespeare's Polonius. Accompanying Thor on a ship that traversed both sea and space, the quartet attempted to halt the coming of Ragnarok, a day when the gods were fated to die. Lee and Kirby, with inking by Vince Colletta (Whose faults were many, including erasing backgrounds. For good or ill his soft line would become associated with the strip.), created a tapestry of imaginative fantasy.

Owing to the creative talents of Lee and Kirby, who were continually growing and exploring the perimeters of the fantasy genre, Thor was a superior entry at Marvel. In collaboration with inkers Chic Stone and Frank Giacoia (who inked issues 114 and 115, respectively, and were followed by Vince Colletta), they translated and recreated the myths and legends of Norse mythology for a new audience.

The great Wally Wood had started on *Daredevil* the year before, putting his illustrative stamp on the character. He made slight modifications to the costume early (the double-D insignia was a notable change, which led to the nickname "DD" by Lee) and introduced new protagonists such as Mr. Fear. Wood hit his stride in Daredevil #7, opening with a beautifully detailed splash of the Sub-Mariner in his undersea kingdom of Atlantis (Wood's use of zip-a-tone added considerable depth). His rendition of aquatic life compared favorably with Sub-Mariner creator Bill Everett's. The plot involved Namor's intent to sue the human race for the destruction of his land due to nuclear testing. He turns to lawyer Matt Murdock for aid, who argues the impossibility of the case to Namor. (These

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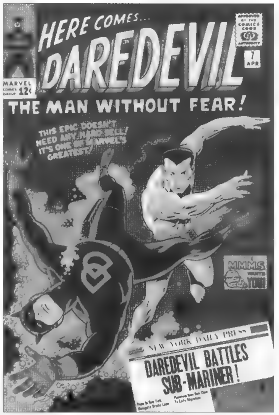
days he would have taken the case immediately and become a millionaire!) The arrogant Namor loses his cool and goes on a rampage, assuring himself of his day in court. Facing political upheaval in his kingdom, he loses patience with the judicial system and heads back to Atlantis with Daredevil in hot pursuit.

The tension and hopelessness of Daredevil's struggle against the overpowering Sub-Mariner is accentuated by Lee's dramatic dialogue and Wally Wood's superb art. Wood gave Sub-Mariner a sense of majesty through body language, as he did Daredevil, who refused to admit defeat. He lost the battle, but Namor departed the surface world and returned to the sea (and into his new series in *Astonish*). Both characters were presented with a sense of nobility, purpose, and a feeling of humanity.

Wally Wood effected another important change with the redesign of Daredevil's costume. The unexceptional yellow and black outfit was replaced with a more innovative red with heavy black for shadow costume. Wood's red and black contrast allowed the artist to play with lighting and emphasize either color, depending on the situation. Wood's design remains an integral part of the character's look. Wood's overabundance of gadgets in DD's billy club was an idea that was less appealing and was soon discarded. The Stilt Man was another memorable villain, a scientist whose hydraulic metal legs made him tower over the streets of the city. (The character may have been designed by Jack Kirby, according to Mark Evanier. Kirby reputedly did such side work from time to time.) Wood's use of perspective was strong, and while the plot was standard, the character's visual signature ensured future appearances.

HERE COMES...
DAREDEVIL
THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR!
BE PREPARED FOR THE ULTIMATE IN SHEER VILLAINY AND SHOCKING THRILLS WHEN THE LONE DAREDEVIL BATTLES THE FELLOWSHIP OF FEAR!
THOSE OF YOU WHO FELT WE COULD NEVER TOP OUR LAST ISH... WAIT'LL YOU FEAST YOUR EYES ON THIS ONE!!
ANOTHER SPECTACULAR FROM THE HOUSE OF IMAX!

#6 (February 1965)

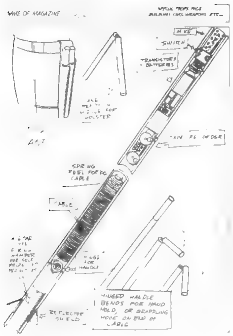

HERE COMES...
DAREDEVIL
THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR!
THIS EPIC DOESN'T NEED ANY HARD SELL! IT'S ONE OF MARVEL'S GREATEST!
DAREDEVIL BATTLES SUB-MARINER!

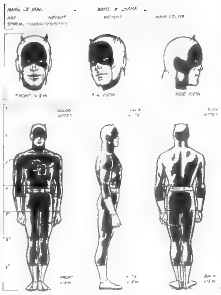
#7 (April 1965)

Beginning with issue 9, Wally Wood's presence would lessen considerably. He laid it out and inked the issue over Bob Powell pencils. The following issue had Powell layouts accompanying Wood finished art, and issue 11 had Wood inking only. Bob Powell was a very capable and expressive artist, and with Wood's hand in the mix it was not a startling change. Issue 10 began the first part of a two-part tale, written by Wood himself. Lee may have given Wood the assignment, hoping to placate him, as he was reportedly unhappy with plotting stories with no financial compensation. Wood crafted a whodunit, but didn't care for the way it turned out and handed it over to Lee to finish. It involved a mystery villain and a bizarre though poorly named quartet of foes (Cat-Man, Bird-Man, Ape-Man, Frog-Man). While overly wordy, Wood's script (with Lee editing) was not without merit.

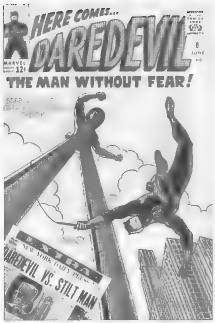
Lee stepped in to write the concluding chapter, which was to be Wood's swan song on the series, and in Marvel Comics, for a number of years. The cover, a blow-up of an interior scene, meant that Wood had already left the premises (covers were usually produced last at Marvel). Ironically, sales probably rose under Wood's tenure, as his last issue moved to a monthly publication schedule.

Wood, an independent artist, never comfortable with perceived editorial interference, decided to move on after getting an offer to develop characters and books for Tower Comics. Their *Dynamo*, *Noman* and *Thunder Agents* sported many of Wood's ideas and art, and were entertaining books adorned with some of his most dramatic and powerful covers. [See *CBM* 97 for two recent articles about these comics.] Wood was also instrumental in starting up one





Wally Wood models for DD and his billyclub.



#8 (June 1965)

of the first fanzines to feature work by fellow professionals (such as Steve Ditko), who retained the copyright to the strips. It was the beginning of independence for creators from the established companies, working on more personal (and not always financially viable) ideas. Wally Wood was a creator, innovator and individualist. He committed suicide in 1980 due to a painful illness, but his brilliance remains on the pages of many comic magazines to be admired and dissected by future generations.

New ideas and characters continued to dominate Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's run on *The Amazing Spider-Man*. "The Coming of the Scorpion" (issue 20), has Mac Gargan, an investigator in the employ of Jonah Jameson, become a willing guinea pig for a Dr. Stillwell's experiment. Gargan is mutated into a creature resembling a scorpion and furnished with a costume and an artificial tail. Jameson enlists him to defeat Spider-Man. The experiment affects Gargan's mind, however, and he becomes a deadly menace that only Spider-Man can hope to defeat (and just barely at that). The story focused on their battle, but also showed the weakness of Jameson's character, in contrast to Spider-Man's heroism. The Human Torch made a guest-appearance in issue 21, (probably at Lee's request) and the rivalry between the two teens was well defined. The final page, depicting Spider-Man beset by a sea of troubles, exemplifies the strip's strong points. Lee's dialogue, such as: "If only I could let people realize who I am..." surely touched on many readers' own feelings of confusion. Ditko's visuals were equally effective (the final three panels has the reader consecutively move further away from Spider-Man, who is standing atop a building, to emphasize his loneliness). Lee and Ditko were able to appeal to a divergent group of readers: Some very young, no doubt, but to high school and college students as well.

After an interesting bout with The Clown and his Masters of Menace, The Green Goblin made his third appearance. Lee and Ditko produced some of their most thrilling tales with the bizarre

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
HOW CAN SPIDER-MAN BATTLE A FOE WHO IS STRONGER THAN HE IS?
HE'S NO ABILITY TO CLIMB WALLS OR MEDDLE WITH PEOPLE'S MINDS!
THE SCORPION!

#20 (January 1965)

#21 (February 1965)

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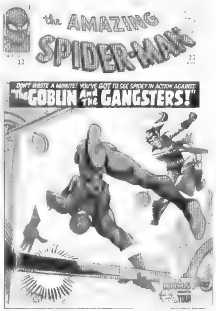
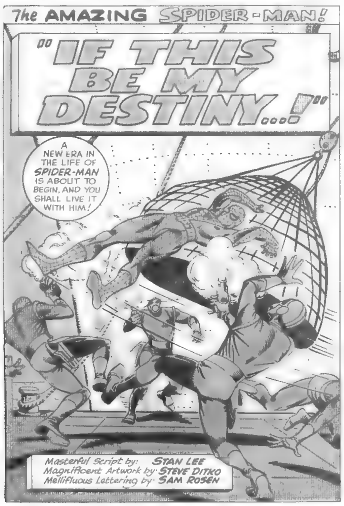
criminal, combining fantasy elements with the mundane criminal world. Ditko was in his element here, portraying a horde of mobsters who could have stepped out of a 1930s Warner Bros. gangster movie. Ex-con Fred Foswell returned, re-hired by Jameson as a reporter for the Bugle (Lee and Ditko deliberately made him a prime suspect in the Goblin's identity), and Peter's relationship with Betty Brant became rocky, with the involvement of rival Ned Leeds. Issue 24's "Spider-Man Goes Mad" was a change of pace, with the return of a villain who was out of costume throughout the story. Mysterio impersonates a respected psychiatrist whose theory of Spider-Man's split personality leads the hero to doubt his own sanity. Ditko achieved emotional resonance by illustrating Parker's fear and trauma with an extreme close-up of his face. Few could compete with him in this area. Changing gears, a bit of silliness took place with issue 25's choice of villain: *Bugle* publisher J. Jonah Jameson himself! Scientist Spencer Smythe (with the help of Peter Parker, who doesn't take him seriously) convinces Jameson that his robot can capture Spider-Man. Parker is surprised to learn that the robot is a real danger, and a chase ensues between it, Parker and Flash Thompson and his high school chums, who hope to see a fight between the two rivals for Liz's affection. Propelled by humor and the type of silliness that is a part of growing up, the story was pure fun. Steve Ditko received his first plotting credit, one he supposedly insisted upon. This issue also introduced Mary Jane Watson, a girl whom Aunt May wanted her nephew to meet. While the device of obscuring her face was all too obvious, her figure was not hidden, and the readers were in on the joke that the girl Peter was studiously avoiding was in reality a knockout.

#22 (March 1965)



#23 (April 1965)


The AMAZING SPIDER-MAN!
"IF THIS BE MY DESTINY...!"
A NEW ERA IN THE LIFE OF SPIDER-MAN IS ABOUT TO BEGIN, AND YOU SHALL LIVE IT WITH HIM!
Masterful Script by: STAN LEE
Magnificent Artwork by STEVE DITKO
Meticulous Lettering by SAM ROSEN

Organized crime was the focus in a two-part storyline involving The Green Goblin and the Crime-Master (*ASM* 26 and 27), a common criminal whose identity was concealed in a black face mask. He had knowledge of the Goblin's identity, and vice versa. This left them at a stalemate, but both had intentions of taking control of the mobs in New York. Once again, all clues point to Fred Foswell being one of the two criminals, but Lee and Ditko turn things upside down by revealing to the reader that Foswell is actually on the side of the police. Disguising himself as a crook, Patch, as he calls himself, gets information about the mobs, in turn getting a byline in the *Bugle*. The use of disguises, deception and concealment were to become Ditko trademarks.

Ditko was in his element, depicting seedy characters, rooftop battles, lonely piers and melodramatic situations. Innovation was another hallmark of the series, with events such as tough guy Flash Thompson taking responsibility for a fight that he and Pete were involved in. Humor was integral with scenes like Peter forced to buy a second-hand costume (to replace the one he lost fighting Jameson's robot) that had an unfortunate habit of shrinking. Lee and Ditko

allowed the hero to be saved by the police. The Crime Master is killed in a shootout with cops, and turns out to be a non-entity. (Ditko seemed to relish the idea of the villain as a nobody. He and Lee were probably at odds on this point; Lee was aware of the dramatic possibilities). This was to be Ditko's last take on The Green Goblin, whose identity would not be revealed until John Romita took over.

Spider-Man #28 sported an effective cover with images of hero and villain facing off in the semi-darkness. While The Molten Man was not a sensational villain, he was a visual treat and Lee's dialogue gave the character a satirical touch. Involved in an argument with employer Spencer Smythe, the disgruntled employee's skin accidentally absorbs a "liquid metal alloy," turning him into a human powerhouse. Ditko plays with technique, the characters confront each other in near darkness, as on the cover.

The final four pages, however, give the book its true notoriety. Peter Parker's graduation from high school was, perhaps, a first in the world of comic book characters. While Lee and Ditko were reportedly at odds with his going on to college—Ditko feeling he should represent the eternal youth; Lee wanting him to grow up and move the series forward—Lee ultimately had final say in the matter. Having a character age, putting him in different situations and changing the status quo were rare events in 1960s comics. At rival DC, Superman would never marry Lois Lane or leave the *Daily Planet* (changes would only occur long after the effects of Marvel's stories were grasped). Lee had the savvy to realize that his books were getting attention from older readers, as well as from the media. He would capitalize on it and expand it. As Lee would later come to realize, there would be problems with this idea of moving forward, but at the time it gained attention and spoke of a new maturity.

Whatever Ditko's reservations, he was able to depict the graduation ceremony, with its attendant emotions, superbly. The crowd scenes were drawn with humor and knowledge; the relief on the faces of the kids recognizable. Liz Allen, who up to that point had been little more than a silly girl who thought Peter was cute, begins to realize that she has to grow up (perhaps Ditko meant for her to be Peter's new girlfriend); these scenes rang true and held sentimental meanings that were felt by readers and creators alike, no doubt. They were small but definitive moments in the series. Lee and Ditko, in both visual characterization and dialogue, were able to produce a bittersweet moment of youth in transition.

The summer of 1965 brought the second *Spider-Man Annual*, featuring a wonderful cover of Spider-Man in a dramatic pose, surrounded by vignettes of the hero in action. Ditko mixed his two characters, Spider-Man and Dr. Strange, together—fashioning these discordant elements in a way that retained the dignity of both strips. Mood, color (probably supplied by the able Stan Goldberg), detailed backgrounds and arcane images gave the tale of Xandu, a sorcerer who seeks possession of a magic wand, to life. Despite the odd nature of the tale, Spider-Man was still true to his character, cracking jokes while being flung into another dimension (Lee helped with lines like "It's gonna take more than a 15-cent bus ride to get to Forest Hills in New York"). Ditko wisely avoided contact between the heroes until the final four pages, adding to the anticipation and preserving their individuality. The fantasy worlds of two of Ditko's unique concepts met under his hand for the first and only time, and, while only twenty pages, it served its purpose as a special event. The remainder of the new material consisted of outstanding full-page drawings of Spider-

[continued on page 49]

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MARVEL 1965

AVENGERS
THE SWORDSMAN!
AVENGERS
YOUR ACTION! MINOTAUR!
AVENGERS
VENGEANCE IS OURS!
AVENGERS
THE ROAD BACK!
DAREDEVIL
THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR
DAREDEVIL
THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR!
DAREDEVIL
THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR!
DAREDEVIL
THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR!
DAREDEVIL
THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR!
Fantastic Four
Fantastic Four
SUB-MARINER
Fantastic Four
Fantastic Four
Fantastic Four
THE BETRAYAL OF BEN GRIMM!
Fantastic Four
Fantastic Four
Fantastic Four
SGT. FURY HOWLING COMMANDOS
SGT. FURY HOWLING COMMANDOS
KILLED IN ACTION
JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY
THOR
JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY
THOR
GIANT-MAN HULK
TALES TO ASTONISH
TALES TO ASTONISH
HULK
SUB-MARINER
HULK
STRANGE TALES
NICK FURY AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D.
STRANGE TALES
THE GRAVE DIE HARD!
THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
MOLTEN MAN!

Mysterious MARV

by Will Murray

Back in *CBM* #44, I told the startling story of the never-published 16th issue of *Amazing Fantasy*, which would have showcased Spider-Man's second published appearance had Marvel Comics publisher Martin Goodman not cancelled the book before press time. I made my case primarily on the job numbers attached to the lead story in *Amazing Spider-Man* #1, and those of two Lee-Ditko backup features, "Prophet of Doom!" (*Tales of Suspense* #40, Apr 1963) and "My Fatal Mistake" (*Tales to Astonish* #43, May 1963) published shortly after *ASM* #1, but which were clearly also part of the unpublished September 1962 *Amazing Fantasy*. They were all consecutive and sported the trademark *Amazing Adult Fantasy*-style Art Simek story-title lettering. One question lingered. By literary detective work, I had reassembled *AF* #16's contents. But where was the cover? Certainly, the cover to *ASM* #1 was not it. That one went with a backup story which featured the Fantastic Four. No other subsequent Spider-Man cover seemed to fit the bill.

Since the cover was usually executed last at Marvel, I reasoned that it might never have been commissioned in the first place. Or it could have been lost, or written off, never to be published, as so many discarded covers (like Steve Ditko's unused cover to *AF* #15) were.

But I couldn't shake the possibility that the lost #16 cover might have crept into print. After all, it wasn't rejected, merely orphaned. It should have been a perfectly good and usable piece of artwork. I began to widen my search when I realized that the covers to both *AF* #15 and *ASM* #1 were the work of Jack Kirby, with Ditko relegated to inker because Stan Lee evidently felt the untried character needed a Kirby cover to sell him. Should I be looking for a Kirby Spider-Man cover, I wondered?

Which led me to a possible candidate. Mind you, the following is purely speculation. Around the time *ASM* #2 was published, Stan Lee went into production with *Strange Tales Annual* #2 (1963), which showcased a Spider-Man/Human Torch team-up. An obscure, rarely reprinted tale, it was penciled by Kirby and inked by Ditko, because it was after all, a Human Torch exploit. The title tells it all: "On the Trail of the Amazing Spider-Man!"

Cover Variants

But if one were to examine just the cover, one would think it was a Spider-Man story. For Spider-Man occupies the central part of the cover. Balanced on an orb web, he's menacing the struggling Human Torch. The logo says: "The Amazing Spider-Man Face to Face with The Human Torch." Shouldn't that be "The Human Torch Face-to-Face with the Amazing Spider-Man"?

The cover is by Kirby, the inker apparently Dick Ayers, but it's not certain. It's not Ditko, that's for sure. Spider-Man's uniform weblines lack the distinctive Ditko touch. And I'm sure if Ditko had inked this cover, he would have remembered to ink in Spider-Man's chest arachnid. Kirby almost always left it off, front and back, when he drew the character. This inker overlooked that critical detail.

Now this cover obviously could not have been the missing *AF* #16 cover as it stood printed on *STA* #2. The Human Torch had no part in the contents of *AF* #16. But while examining the published cover, I noticed some-

thing odd: the fingers of Spider-Man's outstretched left hand were chopped off, as if the cover had been doctored at some stage—and not carefully, either. An old memory tickled me. I recalled that this cover had been tinkered with prior to publication. I remembered seeing a house ad that included word balloons absent from the printed version.

Running to my Marvels, I pulled out *Journey into Mystery* #96 (Sep 1963). A house ad depicted the cover to both *FF Annual* #1 and *Strange Tales Annual* #2. Sure enough, the later cover was different. In the house ad, we find typical wiseacre Stan Lee dialogue coming out of Spider-Man's masked mouth: "Even "you," Torch, cannot escape from the web of Spider-Man!" To which the Torch replies: "Don't get calluses from patting yourself on the back, chum! I'm just gettin' started!" But both characters are silent on the final edition.

There are other differences. In the house ad, the orb web does not extend up into the masthead. In the printed version, it does. The fiery halo that surrounds the trapped Torch in the ad is banked to stray flamelets in the second version. As published, a classic Kirby cityscape is traced into the background, whereas it's absent on the ad mockup. And although difficult to see, Spider-Man's maimed fingers are whole in the ad version. Obviously, this was a cover that went through several alterations as late as the point the ads were being printed.

What has this to do with *Amazing Fantasy* #16? Well, this: suppose one of the reasons this cover was so abused is that it was a salvage job. Pretend this was the cover of *AF* #16. Imagine if the original cover had depicted Spider-Man menacing two ordinary characters, or looming over a pair of panel excerpts from the orphaned backup stories, "My Fatal Mistake" and "Prophet of Doom." It's certainly a possible, even plausible scenario. But is there evidence for it? Yes and no.

The Spider-Man shown on the *STA* cover is a Kirby version of the character, and necessarily shows variations from the more authentic Ditko take on the costume, not the least of which is the missing chest spider. One of the other variations is Spider-Man's underarm

webbing. It followed the original Ditko uniform, which is ribbed like Batman's cloak hem. Although Ditko experimented with the scalloped and straight-edged webbing designs in the early months of Spider-Man's career, by the time of *ASM* #2, it had been standardized to the ruler-straight webbing. In fact, this is the look Spider-Man sports in the annual's lead story.

None of this constitutes proof, and much of this is speculative. But if there was a surviving cover to *Amazing Fantasy* #16, my bet would be that it turned up as the cover to *Strange Tales Annual* #2—with modifications.

Variant covers like that of *Strange Tales Annual* #2 were not rare during the early days of Marvel comics. In fact, they were more common than collectors might suspect. I find over 40 examples of early Marvel cover variants, most subtle, but some quite startling. Many of these variants were discovered by comparing contemporary house ads to the final published covers. Others came to light years later, when certain covers were reprinted and the original uncorrected versions resurfaced through production errors. Normally, comic book cover corrections were made through pastedowns, or on stats, so the original unmodified art frequently continued to exist in pristine state.

These variants are not to be confused with the well-known replacements to rejected covers that include some of the most famous early Marvel covers ever, including two different versions of *Amazing Fantasy* #15, *Amazing Spider-Man* #10, *Fantastic Four* #3 and #20, *FF Annual* #1, *X-Men* #10 and others often reprinted by Marvel over the years. Here is a rundown of examples I've found over the years.

FANTASTIC FOUR #1. Yes, *FF* #1, probably the most reprinted and emulated cover in the history of Marvel, exists in at least three variants. Originally, the awe-struck pedestrians on the sidewalk included four civilians and a police officer. In different reprintings, the cast keeps changing. Sometimes the cop simply disappears, as does the pedestrian behind the recoiling man with the hat. The hatless man at the page's edge is crouching in the original printing, but he's on his knees in subsequent versions. Strangely, these are the only elements on this busy cover that were tampered with.

FANTASTIC FOUR #2. This is an eye-popping variant. It wasn't until the first version of this cover was reprinted in the 1977 Pocket Book paperback edition of *The Fantastic Four* and again in *The Official Marvel Index to The Fantastic Four* #1 in 1985 that the truth came out. Word balloons never before seen are revealed. Sue Storm cries out, "We're too late!! TOO LATE!!" while brother Johnny Storm laments, "My flame is out!! I'M HELPLESS!" In the undoctored cover, Johnny's flames are completely out. But in the correction stage, a nimbus of flame was added to suggest ebbing fires, not extinguished ones. Also, explosive bursts containing the names of the individual members of the FF are removed. Finally, the date and issue number have been repositioned.

FANTASTIC FOUR #11. The brooding Impossible Man cover which masks a light- hearted classic shows unmistakable signs of last-minute alteration. Sue Storm's hairstyle was redone and one leg repositioned. The Thing is also subtly altered. See *The Official Marvel Index to The Fantastic Four* #1.

FANTASTIC FOUR #13. The equally-classic Red Ghost cover was evidently altered prior to going to press. In the

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
12¢
THE Fantastic Four
13
APR
MYSTERY ON THE MOON!!!
MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND MILES FROM EARTH, THE FANTASTIC FOUR FACE THE MENACE OF...
"THE RED GHOST!"
ALSO...IN THIS SPELL-BINDING TALE YOU WILL MEET THE MOST DRAMATIC BEING OF ALL TIME! THE MYSTERIOUS
WATCHER!
WHO IS HE? WHAT IS HE?

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
Fantastic Four
MARVEL 12¢
WITH SPECIAL GUEST STAR THE SENSATIONAL Dr. STRANGE
"THE SEARCH FOR THE SUB-MARINER!"

ITEM CLASSICS #19. When Lee reprinted old *FF*s in *MCIC*, he usually recycled the original cover as well. At times, he commissioned Kirby or another artist to do a fresh cover. For *MCIC* #19, reprinting *FF* #27, for some strange reason Kirby redrew the original layout, giving fans a rare look at a 1964 scene reinterpreted by Jack in his more bravura 1969 style.

FANTASTIC FOUR #30. The Human Torch's flame trail was again redrawn. See it as Kirby meant it in *The Official Marvel Index to The Fantastic Four*. Rotated as seen through their ship's viewport, which slightly alters the craft's look. Finally, Medusa's hair has been trimmed back.

original, the Human Torch seems to be alighting on the surface of the moon. But when reprinted in *The Official Marvel Index to The Fantastic Four* #1, a flame contrail whited out in production back in 1963 is restored, clearly showing Jack Kirby's true intent—the Torch is in actuality "rising" from the lunar surface.

FANTASTIC FOUR #27/MARVEL COLLECTOR'S

FANTASTIC FOUR #38. "Defeated by the Frightful Four!" Another example of careful tinkering to achieve a more dramatic effect. The Torch has been repositioned, and his flame trail changed. A weak-looking Thing is redrawn into a more dynamic pose, but I'm not sure Kirby did the redo. The Frightful Four have been

re-centered and from its typical Kirbyesque fullness.

FANTASTIC FOUR #49. On this, the middle cover of the Galactus trilogy, the nimbus of energy around Galactus' head was blacked out and re-inked for a darker, moodier look. Various reprints have reverted to the original.

FANTASTIC FOUR #52. Lee rejected Kirby's original cover to the Black Panther's debut, which clearly showed the Panther wearing a Batman-like cowl open at the lower face. The interior art also seems to have been doctored to completely conceal the Panther's face, a la Spider-Man. It's a safe bet the published cover originally depicted a half-masked Panther. Since he was Marvel's first black super-hero, perhaps Lee and Goodman were understandably nervous about revealing that fact up front. The only time the original version saw print was in *The Official Marvel Index to The Fantastic Four*. There, the Panther's cape is different.

FANTASTIC FOUR #60. Apparently Stan Lee thought Dr. Doom needed to look like he could go head to head with the Thing. So an energy halo was added. In almost every reprint since, the halo is missing.

FANTASTIC FOUR #62. Rays were erased around Blastarr's body on this cover to clean up the area beneath the Fantastic Four logo.

FANTASTIC FOUR #64. In original cover, the Torch is firing a blast that bounces off the Sentry's shoulder. This was taken down before publication to a feeble fireball, and the story blurbs redesigned. I much prefer the original, seen in numerous reprints.

INCREDIBLE HULK #1. Before going to press, Lee had this cover tweaked. The radiant background was re-inked, removing three dramatic searchlight rays in the process. Bruce Banner's lab coat is retailored. Somehow, the Hulk lost most of his toenails on his right foot. The first version was revealed in Lee's *Origins of Marvel Comics*.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #11. "The Return of Dr. Octopus." The figure of Spider-Man was modified between the time house ads appeared and the finished book hit the racks. Spidey's legs were repositioned. Kirby did the corrections. In some reprintings, Doc Ock's head was replaced, making him look leaner, meaner and removing his sunglasses. Later reprintings revert back to the uncorrected, pure Ditko cover.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #21. Caught between the Human Torch and the Beetle, Spider-Man perfectly dodges a furious flurry of fireballs. When reprinted for *Marvel Tales* #16, the composition is mysteriously simplified. The Beetle's protective shelter is erased. Yet the Torch is inexplicably armed with extra fireballs and a speedline not seen in the original. In later reprints, that telltale Ditkoesque speedline pops up. And so do a bunch of speedlines around Spidey. But there's more: the Torch's contrail and fireball arsenal are different. This cover must have been doctored several times. House ads at the time of *ASM* #21 clearly depict the original "busy" cover, and a recent *Essentials* collection shows shadows in Spidey's costume never seen before.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #31. When this story was reprinted in *Marvel Tales* #24, the splash page was printed as the cover and the much-copied emblematic "If This Be My Destiny" original cover became the splash. This is speculation, but the

action-packed splash looks like it might have been the true original cover to me. More telling, the weblines of the various Spider-Man figures on the cover to *ASM* #31 are washed out to the point of disappearing on the printed cover—a sure sign of art printed from a stat—while the details reproduced on the *Marvel Tales* splash version are clear as a bell. Also, there are weblines radiating from the central white spider outline on the splash not seen on the cover version. Why would anyone bother to add them to a mere splash—unless they had been whited out for the cover version

back in 1965. Note that this is one of the infamous "Marvel Pop Art Productions" covers. Maybe Lee wanted a different look, and swapped cover and splash for that purpose.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #35. Others have noticed that the Spidey figure dropping down on a pure Ditko Molten Man is the work of Jack Kirby. Evidently, the original Ditko pose was obscured by a pastedown, if not obliterated by Kirby pencils. As far as I know, the original unadulterated Ditko version of this cover has never seen light of day.

X-MEN #1. When first printed in 1963, Stan Lee had Marvel Girl's telekinetic

energy crackles whited out, except for a few zigzag lines where they merge with Cyclops' raybeams as they bore into Magneto's force field. In house ads at the time, the crackles are clearly visible, as is a grassy background. In most reprintings of that now-historic cover, including the Marvel Masterworks edition, the censored lines are clearly visible, and a circle appears around the words, "In the Sensational Fantastic Four Style!"

X-MEN #5. "The Angel is Trapped!" Look closely at this cover and alternate elements will jump out at you when compared to 1964 house ads and modern reprints. The window frame is blacked out. Through the plexiglass it's clear to see the positions of Iceman and Cyclops have been swapped, and redrawn. Also, the corner box shifts from the dramatic original and the more-actiony version that debuted with this issue.

X-MEN #10. Stan Lee rejected the original version of the reintroduction of Ka-Zar to the Marvel Universe, but

when Kirby turned in the impressive final version, Lee "still" wasn't satisfied. If you look closely at different reprintings of this cover up to *The Essential X-Men*, you'll see that Ka-Zar's right hand is outstretched. In the original, the fingers were curled. Further, in house ads published at the times, the hand is in still a "third" position, making this the only Marvel cover with three distinct variants.

X-MEN #33. Gil Kane's cover depicting the demonic Outcast was rejected by the Comics Code in 1967, so the less menacing Juggernaut's head was pasted down over it to appease them. Ironically, the Juggernaut was just a shadowy figure in that issue. The secret was ultimately revealed in *Foom* #9 in 1974. And when this cover was reprinted in *X-Men* #81, the original blurb announcing the Outcast was restored.

AVENGERS #4. Prior to publication, a black and white stat of the introduction of Captain America into the modern Marvel Universe was printed in Warren's *Screen Thrills Illustrated*. The words "The Real" appears over the caption, "Captain America Lives Again!" This is a nod to the fact that the Human Torch had battled a fake CA months before. Lee had the qualifying words stripped before printing. The explosive burst surrounding the caption was also dropped at publication, and a banner encapsulating the word "sensational" was deleted from the Sub-Mariner caption. Also, Cap's helmet wings were modified so both flared out. When the cover was reprinted in color for *Captain America* #400, the first version was accidentally used. Another way to tell one version from another is that Cap's helmet wings are symmetrical in the first printing only.

AVENGERS #11. This Chic Stone-inked Kirby cover showing the Avengers caught in Spider-Man's web includes a Steve Ditko-drawn Giant Man figure. Did Kirby forget to include him? Or is this a pastedown over a hidden Kirby figure? It's not clear, but the Spider-Man figure shows strong signs of Ditko's hand, too. And I'd swear it's Bob Powell, not Stone, inking Giant Man.

AVENGERS #22. Kirby goofed when he drew Power Man for this cover. He gave him gloves. This was fixed in the proof stage. See the Masterworks edition for the original uncorrected version.

AVENGERS #23. Another example of a cover hand

alteration. Kang's right hand was lowered to a less menacing position at the instigation of the Comics Code on this, John Romita's first assignment inking Jack Kirby.

STRANGE TALES #130. This cluttered cover is interesting because it's the first time Dr. Strange is prominently cover-featured at the expense of the Human Torch. Kirby drew Baron Mordo besting Dr. Strange, while inset heads of the Torch and Thing in Beatle wigs rob all drama from the Kirby composition. Years later, when the cover was reproduced for *Strange Tales* #183, the heads are removed and the full, unobstructed Kirby cover is enlarged and revealed with all of its background details. A rare example of a cover being improved in reprint form.

TALES OF SUSPENSE #40. Suspense was the most-corrected of all Marvel covers. This minor example shows Iron Man squaring off against Gargantus. All versions of this cover agree—until we come to *The Essential Iron Man*. This uncorrected version shows the crown of a tree over a short building along the right edge. In the production stage, the tree was deleted and the building extended into a skyscraper, apparently by inker Don Heck.

TALES OF SUSPENSE #42. "Trapped by the Red Barbarian." As revealed in the recently published *Essential Iron Man* collection, this cover was originally drawn for *Tales of Suspense* #41, "The Stronghold of Dr. Strange," and is archived at Marvel with the same date, numbering and

TALES OF SUSPENSE
MARVEL
12¢
HOLD YOUR BREATH! HERE COMES
IRON MAN!
SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A DEADLY FOE OF
IRON MAN
LEARNS OF HIS REAL IDENTITY!!
IRON MAN IS BLUNDERING INTO THE RED BARBARIAN'S TRAP! THIS IS YOUR CHANCE!

title blurb appearing on the cover of *TOS* #41. Evidently, the cover was bumped and recycled one issue later with the figure of the villainous Dr. Strange replaced by that of the Red Barbarian, probably in the pencil stage, and a clutter of new blurbs pasted over the once-clean art. This explains why the Red Barbarian is shown at the controls of an elaborate Kirbyesque control panel when in the story proper he possesses no such equipment.

TALES OF SUSPENSE #44. "The Mad Pharaoh!" When first published, Stan Lee and company made a common error throughout this book—misspelling pharaoh as pharoah. When this cover was reprinted in the Iron Man Marvel Masterworks, the error was corrected on the cover and all through the story. But there was one other change: Cleopatra's grim Kirby-style expression was restored. Somebody had given her a strange smile on the original cover. (When this image was reproduced on the cover to *Marvel Collector's Item Classics* #7 in 1967, the unsmiling version was accidentally used.)

TALES OF SUSPENSE #45. You have to be pretty sharp of eye to spot this one. The image of Iron Man on this Don Heck cover is a slightly-retouched stat of the Jack Kirby-Don Heck Iron Man figure taken from the splash of *TOS* #43. This suggests a pure Heck Iron Man hidden under the paste over, which has never been seen. Also, the block of ice imprisoning Happy Hogan and Pepper Potts is different in the *Essential Iron Man* printing of this cover.

TALES OF
SUSPENSE
SEE THE
NEW
IRON MAN!
IRON MAN IS DEFEATED! NOW, NOW CAN THE EVIL PLANS OF THE GREAT MISTER DOLL!
THIS ONE YOU DARE NOT MISS!

TALES OF SUSPENSE #48. When the Marvel Masterworks edition of *Iron Man* came out, this cover, revealing the new Iron Man, showed two minor differences. Iron Man's mouth slits are open, not blacked-out, and the name of the villainous Mr. Doll is lettered differently. While one change is merely cosmetic, the other conceals a little-known fact: the Comics Code Authority objected to the original name, Mr. Pain, and its Voodoo implications, forcing the cover and story to be clumsily relettered. The unaltered cover was finally revealed in *The Essential Iron Man*.

TALES OF SUSPENSE #49. Iron Man "Meets the Angel." In its original appearance, Iron Man sported a single mouth vent. But in the Masterworks edition, a second vent was revealed. It had been whited out originally.

TALES OF SUSPENSE #55. "No One Escapes the Mandarin!" As reprinted in *The Essential Iron Man*, the original shows that the Mandarin's upraised hand was repositioned to a less threatening clench, and his long fingernails were whited out from both hands. Also, the surface Iron Man stands on is blacked out and his shadow dropped.

TALES OF SUSPENSE #57. Stan Lee was very particular about his covers and his splash pages, according to those who worked with him. That's why Jack Kirby drew all the important covers. Yet this cover is the kind of collage using Don Heck interior drawings that was business as usual over at Charlton, but beneath Marvel. Could this cut-and-paste job conceal a lost, rejected Kirby cover?

TALES OF SUSPENSE #58. Early on, while Stan Lee was

constantly revamping Iron Man's helmet, he experimented with blacking out Iron Man's eye apertures. Someone must have done it to a stat of this cover because when it was reproduced in *Captain America* #400, the unshielded eyes were for the first time revealed.

TALES OF SUSPENSE #67. The radiant ink lines around Iron Man and his fearsome foes went unseen and unsuspected until *The Essential Iron Man*"

CAPTAIN AMERICA #100. Not revealed until the cover was reprinted in a gallery of classic CA covers in *Captain America* #400 was this: originally a silhouette of arch-villain Zemo filled the background of this striking composition.

TALES OF SUSPENSE
featuring
THE POWER OF
IRON MAN
MARVEL
12¢
58
OCT
SEE OUR MIGHTY GOLDEN AVENGER
IN MORTAL COMBAT WITH
CAPTAIN AMERICA!
WHY ARE THESE TWO GALLANT ALLIES BATTLING EACH OTHER TO THE BITTER END? ... DURING THE NEXT FEW MINUTES YOU TOO CAN KNOW AND SEE THE ANSWER INSIDE! (IF WE CAN'T ALWAYS BE CLEVER, WE CAN AT LEAST BE HONEST!)

TALES TO ASTONISH #17. "Vandoom, The Man Who Made a Creature!" was one of the very best Kirby-Ayers monster stories of the pre-hero era. When it was reprinted in *Where Creatures Roam* #14, somebody goofed and used the original version, sans Dick Ayers' hairy modifications to the Kirby-Ditko monster figure, revealing the true cover for the first

time. Marie Severin added additional fleeing villagers to the reprinted cover.

AMAZING ADVENTURES #5. This is a true oddity. The Kirby splash page to the lead story, "The Escape of...Monsteroso" performed double duty as the cover—a rare thing for Marvel Comics. But shrinking it to accommodate the title logo evidently threw off the cover's proportions. A strip of new art extended the image along the right edge. Kirby must have been out of the office that day, because the extension is unmistakably the work of Steve Ditko! The line where Kirby leaves off and Ditko begins is clearly marked.

JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #57. An example of a possible variant cover used in the same issue. While the lead story, "Orogo!! The Nightmare from Outer Space!!" was drawn by Don Heck, the splash page was the work of Jack Kirby, inked by Heck. It's possible that Stan Lee simply had Kirby redo the splash, it's just as likely that the splash was the original cover to *JIM* #57. Then why reject it? Simple: Orogo faces away from the reader, a cover no-no. On the final cover, he's front and center.

JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #58. One issue later, the same thing happens. Again, Don Heck draws the lead tale, "I Found Rro!" And again, the splash is the work of Jack Kirby. Said splash is more like a cover than a splash page, with its word balloons. This cover, showing a half-hidden Rro arising from a hole in the earth, might have inspired the classic *FF* #1 cover. If it was rejected, the reason was because the monster was all but hidden from view—not a great way to sell monsters, or the comic books they inhabit. Want more proof? In this case, Steve Ditko did the cover honors—something he rarely did. He simply reinterpreted the same scene, giving the image what was missing. This and *JIM* #57 suggest that there are a pair of lost Heck splashes hidden in Marvel's files.

JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #83. One of the most dramatic early Marvel cover retoolings is also the least known. On this, the Mighty

JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY
INTRODUCING... THE MIGHTY THOR!
THE MOST EXCITING SUPER-HERO OF ALL TIME!!
BEGIN THE SAGA OF THOR IN THIS ISS

Thor's debut, the number of Stone Men from Saturn is drastically reduced—including the largest of them, who's pouncing on the God of Thunder from behind. Almost half the aliens were totally erased! The result is a much cleaner, less busy image. For the original, see Lee's *Origins of Marvel Comics*.

JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #88. "The Vengeance of Loki." This rare Ditko-inked Thor cover shows two distinct alterations when the original and Marvel Masterworks versions are compared. The symbolic zone between Earth and Asgard is inked black, obliterating several planets, and the trademark speedlines in Thor's hammer arc are erased completely.

JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #91. "Sandu, Master of the Supernatural." This is the earliest cover-dated Marvel to sport the new Ditko-designed corner box. The decision to implement it must have come at the last minute because the Masterworks version of the cover shows the full-size cover logo—and no cover box! (Note that the crude early corner illo of Thor was replaced one issue later, indicating it was not considered satisfactory.)

JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #105. Chic Stone has been sometimes accused of inking Jack Kirby coloring-book style. Evidently, Stan Lee thought so on this cover. The published version, showing the Cobra and Mr. Hyde ganging up on the God of Thunder, is dark and moody. Somebody came in and re-inked this cover in spots, which with super-dark coloring makes the difference between it and the original ink job printed in the *Thor* Masterworks look like night and day.

JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #133."Behold the Living Planet." The cover to the first clash between Ego and the Mighty Thor seems unremarkable. But when the identical cover was reprinted in *Marvel Spectacular* #4, Ego's inhuman visage is rougher and more humanlike. Another example of an undoctored stat making it into print years later.

RAWHIDE KID #42. Recycling covers is something Stan Lee never did prior to the rebirth of Marvel, but for this issue—Larry Leiber's first—he reached back into the Atlas Rawhide run and dusted off a striking Joe Maneeley cover from issue #14 (May 1957). Most Silver Age fans have wrongly assumed this to be an oddly-inked Jack Kirby cover. Rawhide's head was redrawn Kirby-style. Looks like the work of Dick Ayers to me. I'm only guessing, but I think this is a last-minute substitute to a rejected Larry Lieber cover.

TWO-GUN KID #77. One of the more dynamic examples of a pure Dick Ayers Marvel western cover takes on new significance when it was reprinted as *TGK* #119. While the cover is substantially the same, the figure of the Two-Gun Kid is very different. Clearly, Dick Ayres' original composition was deemed not heroic enough and an overlay was pasted down on the art to produce a hybrid figure. Yet elements of the Kid's figure are intact, as if this was a salvage job. Could the original figure have been a Kirby pastedown that fell off in the intervening years? You decide.

[continued from page 32]

Man's foes. Ditko's last *Annual* was a memorable one.

Issue 30 was a standard thriller, featuring a cat burglar, but it was notable for some important sub-plots. Liz Allen resurfaces, attempting to evade Flash. She is shown as a more responsible person, employed and quite different from her earlier persona. Betty Brant informs Peter that Ned has proposed to her. When he hears the type of life she wants, one that is opposed to his adventurous lifestyle, he realizes that their lives are going in separate directions and becomes enraged. Ditko conveys Parker's emotions with finesse. Unable to live a normal life, he must come to grips with the life he has chosen.

The last 1965-dated story began a three-part thriller that would cap the Lee-Ditko era. The Master Planner trilogy was one of the strongest, most dramatic tales that Lee and Ditko produced, and the beginning of the end of the Ditko era. By mid-1966, Steve Ditko would leave Spider-Man, Dr. Strange and Marvel Comics. He would return in the 1970s, but never to his most famous co-creations, feeling that you can't live up to the public's expectations. Perhaps he is right. Spider-Man and Dr. Strange have continued with some very talented teams in the years since, but the magic, the newness and the sheer enthusiasm of those stories in 1965 are unique moments in the world of comic art.

#39 (June 1965)

#40 (July 1965)

Marvel's flagship title, *Fantastic Four*, featured some of the best work of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and inker Chic Stone. Issue 34 featured an offbeat story concerning a cold-blooded millionaire named Gideon, who sought world domination by defeating the FF. One of the FF's few non-costumed foes, it didn't sit well with its audience. A more interesting character was Dragon Man, an artificially created creature with a massive tail and wings. He harkened back to the monsters that Kirby churned out a few years earlier, down to the gray coloring and shorts. Kirby, probably inspired by King Kong and the Frankenstein Monster, made the creature child-like and sympathetic.

The Frightful Four were created as evil counterparts of the FF, three of whom had been past antagonists. The Wizard and Paste Pot Pete had fought The Human Torch in his solo strip in *Strange Tales*. The Sandman was a Spider-Man villain who crossed over to battle The Torch. The final member of the team was a new addition, Madame Medusa, a woman whose long red hair became a deadly weapon. Here, Lee and Kirby (whose byline read "Produced By" for the first time) created a quartet of villains who had personalities: vanity, egotism, jealousy and a touch of lust that made them effective protagonists. Next up was a trip to the Skrull Galaxy to avenge the recent death of Sue and Johnny's father. Kirby was showing a keen interest in depicting alien landscapes and provided another compelling photomontage.

As with their work on Thor, Lee and Kirby would take on a more serious tone beginning with issue 37. Continuity threads would weave in and out of each story and developments would be played out over many issues. Once-humorous second-rate villains like Paste Pot Pete were given more threatening names like The Trapster. While this new maturity had its positive points, the frivolous elements that were important ingredients since the beginning of the Marvel super-hero revival were giving way to a sense of self-importance that at times bordered on pretentiousness. Change was inevitable, but there was a distinct sense of innocence fading. It would never be recaptured.

Coincidentally, it was at this point that Chic Stone's final Marvel work appeared. Stone moved on to penciling at other companies, including ACG, Gold Key and Tower Comics. Stone's inks graced many of Jack Kirby's most dynamic, vivid and memorable covers, not only on the super-hero books but the war and western titles as well. Stone gave bold delineation to Kirby's pencils and complimented them in a simple, yet compelling way; one that bespoke of its time and place in comics. Others would work wonders with Kirby, but no one else captured the spirit that Chic Stone, in a very brief and magical moment, was able to. In many ways Stone's departure was the halfway point

in Lee and Kirby's collaboration, and the road ahead would have a look and feel of its own.

With the biblically titled "A Blind Man Shall Lead Them!," the loss of Chic Stone (who had inked a final, memorable cover of the FF and Daredevil walking hesitantly towards the reader, the towering figure of Dr. Doom peering ominously behind them) was softened somewhat by Frank Giacoia, whose crisp inking style had served Kirby well in the past. Left for dead by The Frightful Four, who bombed the island they fought on, the quartet are saved by Sue's force field, but they soon discover the explosion resulted in the loss of their powers. Reed Richards, aware of how vulnerable they now are to their many enemies, is forced to artificially duplicate their powers. Coincidentally, Dr. Doom, their most dangerous foe, regains his memory, and immediately seeks revenge on his enemies. Matt Murdock guests as the FF's lawyer (Lee had then-current Daredevil artist Wally Wood ink DD throughout), leading to his alter ego joining the fray when Doom takes control of the Baxter Building. The sense of helplessness against overwhelming odds propelled the story. *FF* #40 followed, but with neither Giacoia's or Wood's talents. Instead, Vince Colletta stepped in, and his inking was decidedly inferior to his predecessors'. The FF's powers were hurriedly returned (with a poor explanation). What gave a twist to the story was Reed's decision to revert Ben Grimm to his monstrous form. The Thing, enraged by his plight, fought furiously against everything Dr. Doom threw at him. It brought an edge to the tale, and the final encounter between The Thing and Doom had him literally tearing apart his armor and injuring his hands. Without the interference of Reed Richards, it was obvious that The Thing had the potential to kill his enemy. Changed into a grotesque nightmare once again, feeling used by his teammates, The Thing walks out on his partners.

Lee and Kirby's use of continued storylines brought a sense of depth and characterization to their books. A mere 20 pages could no longer contain all their varied ideas, and while this angered some, many others felt they were getting more for their money. It was a new, progressive form of storytelling, and while it did not always flow smoothly, they were, at the least, able to bring new ideas to the books.

Brought into contact with The Frightful Four, The Wizard brainwashed The Thing with his "Id Machine," turning him against his partners. The Frightful Four were portrayed as an evil, dysfunctional "family," each member of which had their own interests in mind. Their personalities were compelling, especially the manipulative Madame Medusa and the scheming Wizard, as each fought for control over the team. The story continued over two more issues, finally restoring The Thing to normal and carting The Frightful Four off to jail, except for Medusa, who Johnny Storm—attracted to her—allows to escape.

Annual #3 (1965)

The summer of 1965 brought forth the third *Fantastic Four Annual*, notable for the wedding of Reed and Sue. Lee used the story as an excuse to guest-star practically every then-current Marvel character (including cameos of Millie the Model and Patsy and Hedy), but it suffered from a poor plot (The return of Dr. Doom, so soon after his defeat at the hands of The Thing, lessened the impact of that story. Doom, behind the scenes, uses his "emotion charger ray" to force all the super-villains to attack the FF.) and, constricted to a mere 23 pages, there was precious little room to juggle both action and drama. The latter was sacrificed, and although the idea of marriage added to the progression of the characters, Lee and Kirby failed to handle the situation in the grand manner that it deserved.

The final two issues dated 1965 added intrigue, mystery and an inker whose sharp, slick style would define Kirby's pencils on the FF for the remainder of the 1960s. Joe Sinnott, no stranger to either Marvel or Kirby, (he had inked Thor's debut and *FF* #5 as well as a few Atlas monster stories) gave the series a sophistication that moved further away from earlier interpretations. The plot of Medusa capturing the Torch and forcing him to help her escape from a mysterious pursuer paved the way for Lee and Kirby to take the character in a different direction. Gorgon, whose feet can cause buildings to crumble, seeks to return Medusa to the race of Inhumans, who live apart from humanity. It was

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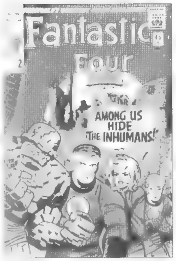

#45 (December 1965)

an interesting, perhaps subconscious allegory of the times, touching on issues that were rarely discussed in comics. Scientist Reed Richards is the voice of logic; he attempts to gain knowledge from the unknown instead of fearing it. With the introduction of Crystal, a teenage Inhuman with powers over the elements who Johnny Storm stumbles upon, Kirby aptly captures the infatuation of youth and the desperation of love against all odds. More Inhumans are introduced: Karnak, who has the power to shatter anything with his hands by finding its weakest link; Lockjaw, an enormous bulldog that can teleport himself and others anywhere, and their leader, the silent Black Bolt, who appears ready for battle in the final panel.

Lee and Kirby kept moving forward on *Fantastic Four* with new ideas and characters, intense and flowing stories and a sense of drama. The epic sweep became a staple of not only the FF, but all other Lee/Kirby collaborations.

There were other events integral to Marvel's transitional year of 1965: The Merry Marvel Marching Society (aka the MMMS, which was likely named after the MARY Marvel Marching Society, a club Fawcett Comics created for its fans in the 1940s, based on the extremely popular Captain Marvel spinoffs) started in late 1964 with full-page ads, almost certainly written by Lee. For the sum of one dollar (a considerable amount at the time: it could buy eight comic books) you would receive a button, stickers (with The Thing pointing to the reader, proclaiming "The MMMS Wants YOU"), a membership card and a record with the voices of Stan and the bullpen (minus Steve Ditko). The fan club was a success, spawning new products, including a line of T-shirts featuring Kirby and Ditko artwork. The club appealed to the salesman in Lee, using self-parody and irreverence (one ad stated "If you're unpopular, if you're unsuccessful...these won't help!"). Added revenue was made for the company (if not the creators). Lee appealed to the blossoming interest in back issues by introducing *Marvel Collectors' Item Classics*, a 25-cent title with early adventures of the FF, Thor and Ant-Man. The "Special Announcements Section," which had been inserted into Marvel's letters pages, was an informal forum that gave the fans the "inside gossip" and latest news on their books and creators. It was soon standardized as "The Mighty Marvel Checklist," a listing of the latest comics (excluding the western and girl titles). Each book was described with unbridled fervor by Lee: "the one you've been WAITING for," "a real TREAT," "this is IT!" By the end of the year it became a part of the "Bullpen Bulletin Page," sharing space with MMMS ads, and Lee recognized fans by putting the names of 25 new members in each book.

An addition to the staff in 1965 was Marie Severin, who, with brother John, had worked at EC Comics in the 1950s; he as artist, she as colorist. After leaving comics for a number of years, she returned to Marvel to handle production work. She was already beginning to do some drawing as well, on the fan club ads and art corrections. She would become one of the most dependable staffers in the years ahead, one of the earliest newcomers and one of the few women, unfortunately, in comics in an artistic capacity.

In 1965, the Marvel Comics Group was brimming with possibilities. Some of the industries greatest talents, such as Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko and Wally Wood, produced work that was (and still is) original, innovative and entertaining. In terms of sheer quality there would be little to compare it to. Stan Lee, company figurehead, editor, art director and public relations man helped give Marvel a sense of identity. Quite simply, it was a really good time to be reading comics.

I DON'T WASTE TIME WITH THREATS, MISTER! THIS IS THE REAL McCOY!
WHUA
I'M WHISTLING IN THE DARK! THE ODDS ARE ALL STACKED AGAINST ME!

The (Super) Human Comedy

Marv Wolfman on his influences

Inspiration Central

an interview conducted by Bill Baker

If Marv Wolfman had contributed to but one of the three ground-breaking critical and popular comic projects which he's typically cited as having been associated with during a rather illustrious career—say that he'd only done DC's apocalyptic Crisis on Infinite Earths *maxi-series, or just scripted the smart, stylish and incredibly popular revamp of* The Teen Titans, *or that his only claim to fame was the sublime* Tomb of Dracula—*his name would be legend. When you add those to the rest of his wide-ranging list of accomplishments in the field throughout the years, it leaves little room to wonder at his enduring popularity among comic fandom. Not that Wolfman is resting on any of his hard-won laurels. Rather, he's been keeping himself busy these past few years reinventing himself as a screen writer of the eagerly awaited animated* Elfquest *film, and toy producer, as well as helping the folks behind The* 10th Muse *comic book by scripting that series.*

Whether it's to be found by watching a film, collecting that final figure from the Elfquest *line of toys, or thrilling to his latest tale within the pages of a comic, all the many fans of the work of Marv Wolfman have quite a lot to look forward to in both the near and far future. In the meantime, however, you'll discover the primary sources of his inspiration in the short interview below.*

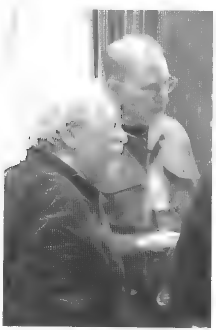

PHOTO COURTESY RANDY ZIMMERMAN

Marv Wolfman (right) with Dick Giordano.

Comic Book Marketplace: How did you discover comics, and what kind of impact have they had on you?

Marv Wolfman: I was five or six when I saw the *Superman* TV show. At the end it said it was based on a comic and I immediately ran out and bought the comics. I haven't stopped in years.

CBM: What were your favorite titles back then?

Wolfman: First, *Superman*. Then *Batman*, *Blackhawk*, *Mystery in Space*, *Strange Adventures*, then a ton of other books.

CBM: Did you have any favorite artists or writers back then?

Wolfman: Since I was a kid in the '50s and they never mentioned artists drew this stuff, all I knew is that some covers looked better than the insides and some stories looked a lot better than others. Slowly I learned there were artists drawing the stories and I learned to tell the difference between them. I definitely followed certain artists although I was buying almost everything I could afford.

CBM: Did your tastes, and your favored titles, artists and writers, change over time

Wolfman: My tastes obviously matured as I did and I began to appreciate artists who were more subtle, either in their art or in their story telling. That didn't mean I had a problem with some

#124 (Aug 1984)

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of the more bombastic artists like Kirby or Ditko—on the contrary their work is subtle, but not in any of the obvious ways. Their subtlety came in the understanding of how characters moved and thought, which was unparalleled.

CBM: Did those same creators and their creations ever provide you with inspiration at some point in your personal or professional life?

Wolfman: Jack Kirby provided a lot of inspiration and guidance for me, both from his work and also in person. I met Jack when I was a young teen and spent a lot of time at his studio absorbing how to think about comics. Another talent I loved who later taught me a lot was Joe Kubert. Indirectly, people like John Broome whose work on *Flash* and *Green Lantern* was excellent. Stan Lee was also a great inspiration, first as a reader and then as my boss at Marvel. He really did understand what comics were all about. Most of the other people I learned from later were younger talents whose work I didn't see until I was older.

CBM: Do you have any influences from outside of comics that have inspired you in a significant way?

Wolfman: Everything influences me, from news magazines to non-fiction TV shows, from TV like *West Wing* to *Dawson's Creek*. Movies, books, etc.... Life needs to influence, otherwise you are cannibalizing yourself.

CBM: What do you hope your own work provides readers? Do you strive to simply entertain with a good, solid story, or are you trying to accomplish a little more with your art?

Wolfman: If that isn't a loaded question, what is? Whatever my plots may be, I try to write stories about people. The themes of my stories—as opposed to the outward plots—are what make me want to write. Yes, I sometimes do big-dumb-fun stories that exist solely to make one smile, but generally my stories are about something important to me. So, my plots may be about saving the world from some alien, but that's not what my story is actually about.

#625 (Jan 1991)

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Canadian Pat Lee caught the perfect wave right out of high school, and has ridden it hard until he's realized his life-long dream of running his own publishing company. Not that it hasn't been hard work, or an altogether smooth ride, mind you. Still, all the sacrifice and long hours have paid off in a very big way for this young artist-entrepreneur and his colleagues, resulting in very good sales on their Transformers *books and other titles.*

All of which shouldn't give the impression that Dreamwave is just about big battling robots, or that Lee doesn't have something in mind that's a bit grander than simply milking a cash cow. In fact, he's got some really exciting things planned, some of which he reveals in a piece we can only call…

More Than Meets the Eye

Pat Lee on Transformers and Dreamwave Productions

An interview conducted by Bill Baker

PHOTO COURTESY DREAMWAVE PRODUCTIONS

Comic Book Marketplace: Would it be fair to say that it's no coincidence that you're working on the *Transformers* comics, that it's almost a dream coming true for you?

Pat Lee: Definitely. I've been a huge *Transformers* fan ever since I was real young. I think it's great to be able to work on such a high profile title, and to be able to take my childhood, kind of bring it to life and actually have it published. And being part of the team—whether it be publishing comic books or in development of some of the design artwork for Takara or Hasbro—is definitely part of my dream. It's a great accomplishment to be able to achieve—publishing a book with such a demand in the comic book industry. Being given the opportunity, I think it really drove our gears when everyone was interested.

A lot of Transformers fans dedicated themselves to try and help Dreamwave get the license. When the license was kind of floating around, there were a lot of guys who put a package together that they sent to Hasbro to get them to allow Dreamwave Productions the right to publish the book. I just felt that we had a lot of Transformers fans who were trying to push Dreamwave Productions, and push the public, to help Dreamwave get the license. We had a lot of fans that were really pushing and gearing us towards that. And knowing that, that Transformers fans backed us up on that, well it makes us want, even more, to do justice to the *Transformers* title.

There were a lot of doubts. There were some Transformers fans who were like, "Oh, I don't know if Dreamwave can handle it," and stuff like that. But when the first issue came out, a lot of those individuals wrote back to us and said, "Wow, I was really surprised when I saw the first issue," because they weren't expecting it to be of the caliber that it is—because we put 110% into every single book. And, even when there's a deadline and it has to go out, we still try to make sure that the quality stands, which I think is one of the most crucial things in picking up such a high profile title.

CBM: There are so many different story lines for the Transformers. You've got the old Marvel story, the British version and the cartoon versions to choose from. How are you dealing with that question?

Lee: Well, Chris Sarracini is actually writing a story that is *not* in the continuity of Transformers. We're basing it, and structuring it, upon what we would like to see from Transformers and tying in our own flavor to it. If we [tried to] put together something that dealt with old continuity, we felt that we would be injecting too many problems and

there'd probably be a lot of arguments around it. It's definitely a tough thing to do, but in order not to obstruct or screw up this storyline, we figured that the best thing to do was to go on our own, and have *our* little world of Transformers and how they would react on earth, rather than have it be part of the continuity of any past Transformers series.

CBM: Right, and that also allows those unfamiliar with the prior continuities to enjoy it, too.

Lee: Exactly.

CBM: How do you decide which of the characters will be appearing in each of the miniseries?

Lee: It's pretty much like we favor certain characters. I love Sideswipe, and I love Red Alert, and I love old Lamborghinis, so you'll see a lot of them in the comic book. [Laughter]

But often on our website—www.Dreamwaveprod.com—we'll hear a lot of ideas. People are like, "Oh, come on, put in Hot Rod. You can do a lot with Hot Rod!" Everyone has their favorites, so we try to put in as many characters as we can, so everyone will enjoy it. Because everyone has their own favorite characters, it's kind of hard. And that's also why we do things in miniseries. We want to get people involved, and we want people to know that their favorite characters are being produced, but sometimes we can't use them all in six issues. And in the second volume, you'll definitely be able to see more characters that weren't seen in volume one. But even the first volume showed a lot of characters.

CBM: What about the Transformers really appealed to you as a kid, and still appeals to you now?

Lee: I think it's the complexity of the toy, and the multiple weapons that it comes with. The opportunity to play with a toy that's like a Rubik's Cube, but instead of it being a square, being able to transform it from one object to the another. And I think the concept and the design of it is really unique in terms of a toy itself. And, because there's so much characterization to all the characters—like Optimus Prime, who shows leadership, who acts like a leader, whose voice is like a leader's and can transform into a truck—I just think the concept alone is what really drives people to get excited about the new Transformers lines, and get excited about the comic books and finding out what happens with certain characters.

I think it's just the package all together. It's like a snowball effect. As you get to know Optimus Prime more, and find out more history about him, you really have a great respect for the characters and the team that produces them.

CBM: Which is kind of interesting, because they're robots.

Lee: Exactly. And I think that's the most fascinating thing, that they have so much human quality to them, and yet they're still robots. Sometimes with Optimus Prime, because he's a robot, you don't expect to see any emotions come from him. But behind the mask, just from a shot of his face and the silence, you can kind of tell what he's feeling inside and how he's trying to express those feelings. And I just think that's really interesting—that just from understanding the character you can get a grasp of what these characters are feeling, *without* actually, physically seeing the emotions on their faces.

CBM: How much of that comes from your writing partner on the book?

Lee: Chris Sarracini, the writer of *Transformers*, is very specific on how he wants the pages to look, to create his vision. But Chris and I sit down and figure precisely how we can work out these pages, what kind of shots, what kind of angle, or what kind of color schematics. We work as a team together, and I think it's really important that writers have that flexibility—a flexibility to nurture the ideas of the artist, and also the colorist and be flexible in general. Like, if this panel doesn't work in this shot, can we alter—not change the writing or the story or whatever—but alter the shot you had foreseen. And Chris is awesome with that. He does have a very specific look that he wants for his writing, and Chris and I are a great team because he has the same vision as myself and my colorist, which is a great advantage.

It's very difficult to find writers, colorists and artists to combine and be able to work as a team together. Which is one reason why I created my own company.

CBM: How involved are you with all the new projects

[continued on page 59]

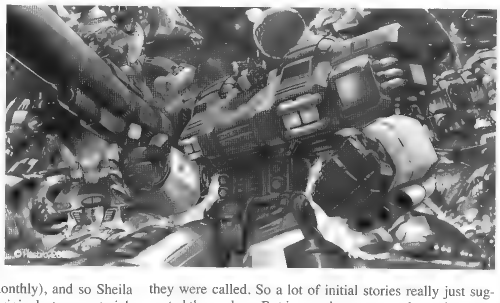
SKYBOUND © MASBO ART © BREAKDOWN PRESS TOM

While he's worked on numerous other properties, original and creator owned, for publishers here in the States and on the other side of the Atlantic, Simon Furman seems destined to be known most for his rather long association with the Transformers *comic book. At times working on two separate versions of the title for two different publishers simultaneously, Furman was the main man behind much of what has become "canon" for the legions of battling 'bots fans. So it should be only a little surprising that he's now associated with one of the new Transformers books being published by Dreamwave Productions for North American consumption, while helping to gear up a new, completely separate European version. The seasoned robot wrangler took a few moments to talk about how he became involved with the franchise in the first place, how he approached the books then and now, his thoughts on the series and his plans for the future of these incredibly popular toys turned media machines.*

The Man Behind the Machines

Simon Furman on his long association with Transformers

An interview conducted by Bill Baker



Comic Book Marketplace: How did you first get involved with Transformers?

Simon Furman: Back in early 1985, after a brief introductory writing stint on the UK horror comic, *Scream!*, I was introduced to Marvel (UK) editor Sheila Cranna. The UK version of *Transformers* (only a few issues old) was already running out of US *TF* material to reprint (it was published fortnightly, as opposed to its US counterpart, which was monthly), and so Sheila was looking for writers to create original story material. Steve Parkhouse was already off and running on a story called "Man of Iron," and I pitched one called "The Enemy Within" to fill the next slot (the first part subsequently appeared in *TF* UK #13). At the time, I knew little or nothing about *TF*, so it was just another job, one I really didn't expect to last for any length of time. I certainly didn't expect to still be writing *TF* nearly eighteen years later.

CBM: What were some of the special challenges and opportunities this series presented to you?

Furman: The challenge was to make toy characters interesting. A lot of the hard work had already been done, as each TF character came ready-equipped with its own little biography, strengths, weaknesses and so on. Tech Specs, as they were called. So a lot of initial stories really just suggested themselves. But it was clear to me early on that I had to write these characters as if they were flesh and blood to draw people in. The gimmick of Transformers, I felt, could only go so far before people stopped caring, and therefore stopped reading. So there had to be more. I tried to introduce more layers into the characters, flesh out the background stuff and pull the reader along with continuing storylines. In the process, it helped me a lot as a writer.

CBM: How long did you work on the British version of *Transformers*, and what were some of the personal highlights of that run for you?

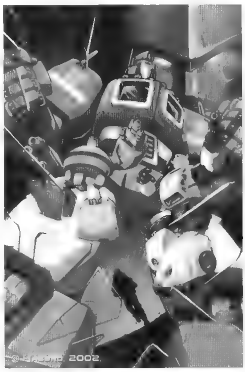
Furman: The UK comic stopped originating in September 1990 (issue 289), by which time the strips were five pages and black and white (as opposed to 11 pages of color). In those five years, I wrote over 1,500 pages of *TF* UK mater-

TRANSFORMERS © HASBRO ART © DREAMWAVE PRODUCTIONS

tal. Highlights include "Target: 2006," still my personal favorite, the whole Death's Head storyline, "Legacy of Unicron" and "Time Wars" (of the color strip). It's great to have these story arcs finally collected, reprinted by Titan Books (and exposed to readers both sides of the pond). Of the black and white material, I fondly remember the Nightbeat detective two-parter (UK #230-231), a Mecannibals story in which Dreadwind and Darkwing just get drunk and talk about nothing for the whole five pages (UK #240), the "Aspects of Evil" storyline (UK #223-227) and the whole Carnivac arc that ran over several issues (the nearest thing to a full blown continuing story arc).

CBM: While you were still working on that version, you also began working on the Marvel series. How'd that come about, and why did you choose to accept the offer?

Furman: Through Marvel UK I met *TF* US writer Bob Budiansky. He and I kept in touch, and when he was ready to give up the book, he (and editor Don Daley) contacted me. Bob kind of undersold the opportunity, saying that the book's days were numbered, but I still grabbed it with both hands. Here was a chance to steer the core comic continuity, and maybe even unite the two a little more. And it was an "in" at Marvel US, and you don't look that gift horse in the mouth.



CBM: How did the American series change once you came on? Did you essentially follow the path that had been laid down for you, or did you decide to head off in your own direction?

Furman: Right from the start, or at least after a reasonably formula four-parter, I decided to up the ante (no one was really looking over my shoulder or giving me dos and don'ts, even Hasbro had lost their fine tooth comb). If the comic's days were numbered, then we were going to go out with a bang. Five issues in, I got my version of the TF origin established (from UK #150), in the sixth, Unicron appeared (and UK artist Geoff Senior had made his US debut). Eight issues later, Andrew Wildman was on board and we were steaming towards a big blow out battle with Unicron. In the end, I got to do 25 issues (it was canceled with issue 80), one of which was double-sized. Not bad for a book on its last legs. And it's worth noting that *TF* US was selling around 70,000 copies when the axe fell, which (by today's standards) is almost a top seller.

CBM: What were some of the highlights of your run on this branch of the *Transformers* legend, and what about those particular issues made them special for you?

Furman: I think the US run from #69-80 is a standout for me. It was (and probably still is) one of the most sustained and tight bits of writing I turned in, and with Andrew (and Geoff for one issue) on board our creative telepathy was working overtime, it just flowed effortlessly. It was a pure pleasure to write, and (now) re-read. I'm my harshest critic, and there's some stuff that still to this day makes me wince, but as I leafed through the two Titan collections, "All Fall Down" and "End of the Road," I could find little to fault in that run. I felt satisfied I'd told the biggest and (arguably) best *TF* story, and carved my initials on the legend.

CBM: Was it difficult to keep the two continuities separate in your head? What about some more subtle things, like any differences in overall tone, specific characterizations and such?

Furman: By the time I was working on the US series, the UK stories had become lighter in tone, or simply (due to the nature of the five-page format) more focused, some almost throwaway. I did try and loop one storyline over (in the US comic, Prime refers to a Deathbringer, from the UK comic), but on the whole I had a different template for the two comics. US-wise: big, expansive and epic (as I used to do for the UK). UK-wise, smaller character pieces, more self-contained. Also with the UK, I knew we were on borrowed time. There was every chance, as 1989 became 1990, that the UK comic would be canceled or stop originating, so long, involved storylines were out of the question.

CBM: How did you create the stories for both books? Did you work alone, generating the plots and such and then hand it off to the artists, or did you work with them to build the plots?

Furman: I talked a lot with Andrew about the US series, but the UK stories tended to be handed in and farmed out to whichever artist was available. In a strange inversion of how it used to be, for a chunk of this latter period I was living out in New York, and sending UK scripts winging their way back home over the Atlantic. It felt strange. On the whole with *TF* I just used to go my own merry little way. It would have been tough, I guess, for an editor at Marvel UK to tell me what to

do or not to do, given the sheer volume of hours (both as writer and editor) I'd put in on the series.

CBM: What about characterization? Was it a bit of work to put in character moments and other "emotional issues" into either series, or did they just seem to arise naturally from your plots and the inherent conflicts between the 'bots?

Furman: I was always very aware that no matter how "epic" the story got, it had to be underpinned by solid characterization and the "smaller" moments that give a story its heart. There was always a lot of angst and rounded character-development "arcs," after all I'd been schooled in the Marvel style of scriptwriting. I've always tried to make characters rather than events drive a story.

CBM: After these series ended, what did you do? What are some of the special moments or accomplishments that have a warm place in your heart?

Furman: On US #80's letters page I wrote, "...it never ends, but for me it does..." and regretted it ever since. Transformers just kept rolling back for me. First it was the 12-issue *TF Generation 2* series (that ran from 1993 to 1994), then the *Beast Wars* comics for US TF convention Botcon, then an episode of the *Beast Wars* TV series (that got me my start in TV animation scripting), Season three's 'Nemesis' part 2. I guess I'm most pleased when I meet people who grew up reading my *TF* stories, and they tell me how much they meant to them (and stayed with them). Some tell me it inspired them to read more or write themselves. It makes it hard to stay humble some days.

CBM: You've recently signed on to pen not just the one version of the new generation of Transformer tales with Pat Lee and Dreamwave, but another series for European consumption, as well. How did these new opportunities come about?

Furman: To be honest, once I heard that Dreamwave was after the TF license, I was knocking on their door. I really wanted to be involved. I'd stopped thinking *TF* was some kind of handicap to my writing career and learned to appreciate all it had done for me. I'd also been exposed (at conventions and via the Internet) to the fanbase, something I'd never really known existed before. I had no idea when writing either the original UK or US comic that there was any such thing. I realized I was a part of something big, and I wanted to be a current part of it, rather than "the guy who used to write *Transformers*." Dreamwave was very kind and accommodating, and so "The War Within" was born. And that's kind of rolled into other stuff. A two-issue guest writer slot on Dreamwave's *Armada* comic became ongoing, and I'm now writing the UK version of *Armada* as well (for Panini UK, formerly Marvel UK). It really has come full circle.

CBM: Will there be any major differences, aside from basic story lines, between these two versions? If so, what lead to that decision?

Furman: There's a slightly different age pitch. The US *Armada* comic, while aimed squarely at the kids buying the toys and watching the TV show, has a stronger edge and approach than the UK comic, a few bigger words stay in. But that said, I learned early on in my career never to write down for kids. So I approach the two with a similar action-adventure beat. The storylines will, no doubt, diverge a little bit (I don't just want to re-hash US stories for the UK market). I'd like to give the UK comic its own identity, its own unique feel and structure. For a start, the UK story (as of issue 3) will split into two, a kind of lead (more or less ongoing) story and a supporting strip, tentatively titled "Tales of the Mini-Cons," which will focus just on Mini-Cons, few or no Transformers allowed.

CBM: Do you face any significantly different challenges doing these characters today?

Furman: I think there's a greater maturity in comics readers (and kids generally) today, which tends to mean that the demands are greater to perform to a high level. I don't think these days you can get away with rambling descriptive panels telling you what's going on, you have to be a lot leaner and meaner. Also, as with any enduring property, it has to evolve, and that goes for the comics (and the creators) as well. What worked back in 1985 won't necessarily fly today, so you have to constantly review what you're doing.

[continued on next page]

TRANSFORMERS © HASBRO ART © DREAMWAVE PRODUCTIONS

[continued from page 55]

coming out of Dreamwave?

Lee: I create a lot of the projects, and I co-plot some of the projects. All in all, I'm very involved. I have so many concepts, and so many ideas, and it's just like one day I'll be in the washroom taking a leak or something, and I'll be like, "Oh my god! I thought of the coolest concept!" It's very frequent, my ideas, and I want to publish the books right away, just because it's fresh, it's new and it's in my head. And because I think of so many concepts and so many ideas, often I'll jot them down and just file them. [Laughter] So I have like 20 to 30 folders of just paper napkins and whatever I could get my hands on at the time to put my drawing on and my ideas. I do try to get my hands on as much as I can, but I think our company is growing to a level in which I won't be creating and co-plotting every little thing that does come out of Dreamwave.

INTERVIEW: SIMON FURMAN

[continued from previous page]

CBM: What do you hope to accomplish with the new work?

Furman: Two things. I want to keep the existing fans happy (not easy when they're split between TV and comic continuity) and also bring in new readers, not make the level of starter knowledge prohibitive. This is why I'm glad we've got *Armada*. You can maybe afford to be a little more fast and loose with the "classic" Gen 1 stuff if, hand in hand with this, goes *Armada*, which is still young, and with its own pocket continuity.

CBM: Anything else that you've got going on which you'd like us to know about?

Furman: My "other" project (*TF* is keeping me very busy) is *NecroWar*, an all-new (non-TF) sci-fi series for Dreamwave. It's a dark and epic future war story, my trademarks I guess, and the art (by newcomer, to comics at least, Adi Granov) is superb. Very different, almost photo-realistic, more European in style. It's going to blow people away. The first issue is tentatively scheduled for May 2003.

CBM: What do you, as a creator and otherwise, get from working on *Transformers*?

Furman: A real sense of belonging to something enduring, a defined and recognized part of our popular culture. It may be a strange version of fame, but it's fame nevertheless. TF is something that has defined my career, opened doors and provided a real sense of accomplishment. I'm hugely grateful, and hope it will roll on for many years to come.

CBM: What do you hope your fans and readers get from your work?

Furman: Enjoyment, pure and simple. I don't set out to try and create great or thought-provoking literature, I'm not sure it's in me, I just want people to be entertained, to feel they've stepped onto the equivalent of a roller-coaster, and enjoyed the ride, the rush of adrenaline. If it stays with them, for say the next eighteen years, that's a bonus.

Note: For more information on Simon Furman's work on Transformers, *past and present, go to* ***www.dreamwaveprod.com*** *or* ***www.bigbot.com***.

CBM: How do you develop a series? Is it a collaborative process?

Lee: Yeah, pretty much. We all sit at this cafe called Just Desserts. We've been going there for the last nine years, and pretty much every time we create an idea, we're always there. And it's not because we mean for that to happen; it just happens that way. The very first concept we created, which was *Darkminds*, we created at Just Desserts, and [all the way] up till now, to plotting *Transformers*. We were just there last night, trying to figure out what we were going to do with *Transformers* volume 2. It's pretty much all the guys sitting together, collaborating. We include everyone. We try not to leave anyone out. Bring the colorist, the penciler, the letterer. Try to get a grasp of what we can do that's innovative and different, and try to do things that no one's ever really done or touched on before, in terms of marketing, advertising, and from an artistic point of view.

CBM: I'd imagine that doing all of these new projects Dreamwave has planned, getting the work of all these new folks into print, is a way for you to pass on that kind gesture that Dan [Fraga of Image Comics] made when he helped you break in.

Lee: Exactly. The thing is, it is really true that Dan never got any recognition. And the only ones who really still keep up with him today are probably myself and a couple other artists that he brought into the industry. I think [he did all that because] of his good heart, and from seeing how many good artists are out there that don't even get an opportunity to touch a pin up. And these people need work more than some of the other artists that are getting way overloaded. Like, I'm just getting way overloaded with my work alone. So if I can pass some of my work to someone else who hasn't even touched comic books, I think that would help give him training and give him an opportunity to delve in. A lot of companies aren't willing to invest in new talent. Dreamwave Productions is all about investing in new talent, because we believe in it.

Note: If you're interested in further details on Dreamwave's Transformers, *or their many other projects, go to* ***www.dreamwaveprod.com*** *for more information.*

Mike Grell has been a force to be reckoned with in comics from the moment his first professional work appeared in Superboy *#202. Soon after his debut, Grell had firmly established himself as not just a dynamic and accomplished artist, but also as someone with a finely honed sense of storytelling. Not content with just visually realizing other folks' stories, he eventually began to write his own tales. Inevitably, both of these talents were harnessed by Grell and powered his long and memorable runs on a variety of titles, including* Warlord *for DC Comics, and* Jon Sable, Freelance, *which was published by Pacific Comics.*

Strangely, despite all of his years working in comics, he never did any substantial work for Marvel Comics. Aside from a few pin ups and his contribution to the Heroes for Hope *charity book, fans of the House of Ideas had to go without Grell's patented blend of high adventure, hard edged realism, and insightful scripting for far too many years.*

Until recently, that is.

That's because Mike Grell has finally entered the Marvel universe with a vengeance, taking over the scripting of Iron Man *with an eye to restoring the luster to old Tin Head's armor and reputation. If the positive response from both critics and readers alike is any indication, he's succeeded admirably.*

The Man Behind the Iron Mask

Mike Grell on Iron Man

An interview conducted by Bill Baker

Note: As this issue was in production, CBM *learned* Iron Man *#64 was Mike Grell's final issue on that title.*

PHOTO COURTESY RANDY ZIMMERMAN

Comic Book Marketplace: You recently took on the scripting, and occasional art work, on *Iron Man*. Why Iron Man, and why now?

Mike Grell: The answer is a lot simpler than you would think—the job came up, and it was offered to me. I guess the question behind it is probably, "Why not a long time ago, and why this particular character?" I hadn't ever done any work for Marvel in the past, other than a few pin ups around the Marvel Universe, and a few pages that I allegedly wrote on the *Heroes for Hope* book. In truth, Chris Claremont never gets enough credit for that. He virtually wrote that entire book, and all the writers had to do was convert it into their own particular voice, I suppose, for dialogue, and a couple very minor bits of business. But Chris was really the creative genius behind that [project].

I always seemed to have been busy doing something else. I guess that's probably the best answer that I can give. A few years back, about five years ago, I actually had a Spider-Man project that Marvel had approached me to do, and we were several months into the creative process on that when the bottom fell out and they pulled in all of their creative horns at once, and that project completely evaporated.

So when Iron Man came up, Tom Breevort contacted me and asked me if I was interested in it, I said, "Sure!" I'd had a really good creative relationship with him, working on the

IRON MAN © MARVEL CHARACTERS

development of the Spider-Man project, and it was through no fault of his that the project was never seen through to completion. So, when the offer was made, "Would you be interested in *Iron Man*?" "Naturally."

Iron Man is one of my teenage icons, I guess. I had first issues of all the Marvel comics under my bed when I was a kid. But then I went off to college, and they're not there anymore, for some strange reason, although I do periodically look. I had *Spider-Man* #1, and Fantastic Four, and Thor, and The Hulk and *Iron Man* and all that. But Iron Man was a character that was ingrained in my youth, so it didn't take an awful lot to swing into those shoes.

CBM: What about this particular character appeals to you? Was it the fact that you could really understand his plight as a millionaire playboy with a jet set lifestyle and a dangerous alter ego?

Grell: Yeah! [General laughter] Yeah, right.

No, actually, it's almost the opposite. In approaching *Iron Man*, I saw Tony Stark as a man who, for all his wealth and power and everything else, was cut off from the world and society by the very thing that made him extraordinary—which is the armor that he wears. It protects him from attack from the outside, but it also seals him away from the humanity of the world around him.

He can't get close to women. He can't seem to bring a relationship to a full completion. He has friends, but they seem to come and go. He has serious problems in his own life, with alcoholism and everything else that's attendant with it.

Being a multi-millionaire and a boy genius ain't no box of chocolates. As we've seen in a lot of the story lines, the more powerful you are, the bigger target you become. And if you try to balance that with running around and playing super-hero, then you've got additional problems, as well.

CBM: How important is that duality between Tony and his alter ego to your conception of the book?

Grell: I see it as vital to the book. The character of Tony Stark is a man who dresses in a suit of a machine. His industry is involved in building machines, and building mechanical devices, and building computers and electronic gizmos that could, in some places, take the place of a man, and he's fighting for his humanity inside of this. And, worse yet, he's locked into it, because without the armor, he can't survive. That was one of the things that always appealed to me about the character, this inherent frailty that he had when he had a human heart that was weakened.

So here's a man who, for all his wealth and power, and physical power, is at heart a very human, very frail individual. When they did away with his human heart, and gave him a mechanical heart, it took away a lot of that aspect. So what I did was to re-institute the aspect of needing to recharge on a really regular basis, and locked it in such a fashion that the mechanical heart could draw power from the suit, but it could also be done the other way around; since the systems were linked, if he were to run the suit out of power, his heart would run out of power, and he would die.

CBM: I'd say that's welding it together fairly solidly. [Laughter] Were there any new challenges that working for Marvel offered you which you might not have had to face so far? For instance, did you have to adapt your storytelling at all?

Grell: You know, I thought I would, but it turns out that it was a lot easier than I expected. Probably one of the reasons is that, on *Iron Man*, I have the privilege of working with a really creative editor. Tom Breevort is one of the most creative guys I've had the pleasure of working with. He has an innate storytelling ability, or at least an innate understanding of storytelling. He knows what works. He knows how to cut through the crap. Sometimes writers, like myself and—I'm going to mention his name, not putting myself in the same category—Stephen King tend to wander from our path a bit, and we need the hands of a good editor on the reins to keep us steered in the direction that we're going. King is totally autonomous, of course, so no one can stop him from writing fifteen hundred pages of a novel. But thank God Tom Breevort has the ability to look at some of my stuff and say, "You know, this is good, but it really doesn't belong in this story."

CBM: Do you plan on staying with the book for a while, then?

Grell: I'm quite happy with my association with Marvel, and with Tom, and with *Iron Man*. Nothing is etched in stone and, of course, the fates being what they are, we live on a day-by-day basis in some cases. I was asked recently if I had other projects in the works and, of course, the answer is, "Yes!" Creative people don't stand on their laurels. Not

for very long, otherwise we just stagnate. I have something in development, and some other things that I would like to do. But I have really enjoyed working on *Iron Man*.

CBM: Well, what are some of those other projects? Will we get to see that aborted Spider-Man project in the future, for instance?

Grell: The Spider-Man project, I think, was probably thoroughly hammered into the grave by the movie. There are aspects and elements that I dealt with there that I think, given the public conception of Spider-Man right now, probably wouldn't fit, although there are some fairly remarkable similarities. But that's just one of those things.

The storyline that I gave them was almost talking between the lines of the past stories that we have seen. For instance, I was given a constraint that I could talk about anything that happened between panels, but anything that happened in a panel was sacrosanct. And so, if it was in print it was part of a back story, and I had to pretty much leave it alone. But I was surprised at how much room there was for some interesting character development there.

My basic approach was, if you're a teenage boy who's bitten by a radioactive spider, and one day you wake up on the ceiling, you're natural reaction has to be, "Where the hell does this stop? If this is stage one, what is stage two? Do I suddenly grow eight legs and seventeen eyes and sprout hair all over my body and start wrapping up my girlfriend in a spider web and devouring her, or what?" I thought that was a lot of fun.

There are a couple of characters over at Marvel that I really have enjoyed over the years, and two, in particular, that I'd give my right arm to take a whack at: the Black Widow, and Captain America.

CBM: What aspects of those two characters are particularly attractive to you?

Grell: Well, with the Black Widow, I'm a Natasha man, myself. [General laughter] I can't help but admire a woman like that. I like the elements of her back story. I like the intrigue of international espionage, and I like the fact that she can be portrayed as a Russian ex-patriot. In the world that we see today, she is basically a female James Bond with a lot of sex appeal, I suppose. She's a combination of an intelligent woman and a very physically attractive, and physically action-oriented, character. There's not much to dislike about that! [More laughter] But then, I'm a guy. You know, that's one of those things.

As far as Captain America goes, my first introduction to Captain America was [via] the Golden Age Kirby comics left over from my dad during World War II.... I always loved that character. I think it would be interesting to explore Cap in terms of what a man from the 1940s thinks of the world in the new millennium, looking at the ideals we started with, and where we will have gotten.

CBM: What are some of your general plans for the future? Are there any other forthcoming projects that you can talk about at this point?

Grell: Well, at the moment I'm working on a second *Sable* novel. It's hanging fire right now, waiting for us to finalize a film deal. The first novel was published by Tor a couple years ago, and at that time we had a motion picture on the line that was two weeks from green light when the SAG strike was looming on the horizon, and they decided not to push it into production too fast, because we all saw what came out of that. There were a lot of movies made in a rush that really looked that way when they hit the big screen, and wound up doing really crappy at the box office. And then, just as everything settled down, 9-11 happened, and the *Sable* movie fell victim to that sad event. Also, we're in the process of putting together a deal...[with] a television outfit that's seriously interested in *Maggie the Cat*.

In addition to that, I've got two other novels that I've begun work on—fairly substantial work—and an illustrated book as well, that requires a ton of work to do the writing and the illustration. It's going to be a few years down the pike before it sees the light of day. And then, there are two comic book projects that I'm working on developing.

And the answer to the unasked question is, "Yes, one day you will see Jon Sable back in comics." I can't tell you exactly when, but, certainly, with the interest in a motion picture, it seems silly not to put it back into print.

I'm currently in discussions and negotiations on a comic book property with a publisher. We're in the paperwork stages on the thing. I wish I could tell you more, but I can't.

CBM: With the possibility of Sable and Maggie coming to the big and small screens respectively, the question of just how interested are you in doing work in those fields naturally arises.

IRON MAN © MARVEL CHARACTERS

Grell: You know, I'm interested in it. I wrote the preliminary screenplay for *Sable*, and I've got a couple of other screenplays that I've completed. I would love to crack into film, but the hard reality is that—as wonderful as we comic writers all think we are at telling stories, and we always think that we can do a better job than anyone else—the real, hard truth is that, by and large, Hollywood doesn't care. [General laughter]

The best example I can give you on that one would be Max Allen Collins on *Road to Perdition*. He wrote the comic, he wrote the novelization adaptation of the screenplay, but didn't get to write the screenplay. And Max has written a couple of screenplays, and actually produced a couple of indie features. The one doesn't necessarily translate into the other, and sometimes that's a good thing, sometimes that's a bad thing. The bad, as I see it, is that a lot of times a project can be corrupted along the way by the typical Hollywood vision of what things are supposed to be.

My best, personal example of that would be if you took a look at the old *Sable* television series that was done on ABC. It was abysmal from the word go. They had some wonderful people working on it, and some terrific actors. I like Lewis Van Bergen, and it's hard to argue with Renee Russo playing Eden Kendall. But both the producers and the director did not get what the story and the characters were about, and it cost them big time. The show was canceled after the second episode. I firmly believe it wouldn't have happened if they had just listened to me, but they weren't interested.

CBM: What do you hope people get from your work, be it in comics, novels or whatever you do?

Grell: Well, I hope they come away entertained to begin with. And I hope that, somewhere along the line, I can provoke conversation and intelligent thought. I don't pretend to have a lot of answers.

An interviewer once asked me where I stood politically; I'm pretty much a middle-of-the-roader, leaning toward conservative. But there are a lot of things about the conservatives that really appall me. And then I look over at the liberal side, and there are things there that stun me. I wish I could jump solidly behind one or the other, but I'm neither. I always used to say, "I don't like people," but that's wrong. The truth is I do like people; I just don't care much for the human race. [General laughter]

I see my job as a storyteller as raising questions, and letting people find the answers for themselves. I don't have the answers, sometimes even in my own life, so I can't really pretend to tell other people how they should make their decisions. But in some instances I'm able to point out that the emperor has no clothes, and he has a really tiny little winkie. [More laughter] And I kind of enjoy that part.

CBM: Would that go part way, at least, towards explaining what you get from doing the work?

Grell: Oh, yeah. I've always considered myself a storyteller. I try to tell stories either with my pictures, or with my words, and I like to take the reader into a world and a place that he hasn't been before, show him something that he hasn't seen before. Sort of like peeling the layers off an onion, and "What is at the center of the Tootsie Pop, after all?" I like to take him down a path, and try to show him things along the way that will provoke. Sometimes, I do go for controversy. I can't deny that. But other times, I'm just trying to tell the best story that I can, and take him on a hell of an adventure.

During my run on *Green Arrow* I had an awfully good run of luck with the controversial aspects, and that was largely because people were giving me more credit than I deserved. I took most of my more extreme stories straight out of the headlines, and people thought I was making this stuff up.

CBM: Truth is always stranger than fiction.

Grell: Oh, it is. The episodes of *Green Arrow* that dealt with biker gangs selling girls into white slavery featured a

scene where a girl is crucified, and people really got up in arms on that one. I had a young lady who called me a misogynist, and asked how could I do such things to women. I didn't do this to women.... This was something that actually happened.

I remember, years ago, picking up an injured crow on the side of the road. I took it to an animal shelter to have its busted wing fixed, and listened to the lady at the shelter tell stories about some of the badly mistreated animals that they'd dealt with in the past. I was horrified at what I was hearing, and she looked at me, patted me on the cheek, and said, "Honey, that ain't nothing compared to what they do to their own children."

CBM: You do some pretty interesting things in your spare time, don't you? You don't just sit around reading Hemingway to get your thrills.

Grell: Well, I've been known to! [General laughter] But, yes, I live a rather active, real world fantasy life in my spare time. Tonight I'm performing in a live action murder mystery on board *The Spirit of Washington* dinner train, where I'm going to be a hired killer, and I will be found dead before the night is over. I'm not giving anything away, which should come as no surprise.

Along with that, my wife, Lauri LaSabre, and I perform with a group called the Seattle Knights, which is a live action medieval show troupe. We do renaissance fairs and festivals all over the United States. Our troupe has performed as far away as Connecticut, and most recently did the Scottish Highland Festival in Estes Park, Colorado, for a crowd of about seventy thousand people.

We do family oriented shows on the order of what you would see at Medieval Times, or Excalibur in Las Vegas. Lauri and I sword fight. We use real steel swords and weapons. Actually, authentic weaponry and armor. And we joust, which involves knocking me off my horse a lot.

We have a ranch here in Lake Stevens, Washington, called Excalibur Friesians, where we raise Friesan horses. Which is the same kind of horse used in the movies *Ladyhawke* and *Mask of Zorro*. They come in black, black, or black, and you can get them with black upholstery. They're the actual type of horse that the Teutonic knights rode off on to the Crusades in the 12th century.

As I said, the shows are family oriented stuff—you know, good versus evil, good guys versus bad guys—integrating elements of fantasy. We have a lot of lady fighters and knights in our shows, as well as the men, and training is pretty rigid. You have to learn to become a good swordsman before they'll let you swing a steel sword at someone. And training for jousting is every bit as rigorous. We start with someone who has good riding skills to begin with, and, once the horse and rider are working in combination very well, then we put them through a thirty hour training course together to teach them how to joust properly without killing their opponent, and how to fall off a horse properly without killing themselves. Which I get to do four or five times a day.

I mostly play the bad guy. Even when I'm a good guy, I'm not necessarily all that terribly good, and a bit on the foppish side, so I always try to play it for humor.

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Note: Those looking for further information on Mike's activities with the Seattle Knights should head to their website, ***www.seattleknights.com****.*

The work of Bruce Jones is no doubt familiar to the readers of CBM, *even if they're not aware of it. After all, this is a writer-artist who found his first whiff of success working for those dearly loved, still-lamented Warren magazines* Creepy *and* Eerie, *lo those many years ago. Springboarding from there, Jones soon was a regular contributor to such high profile publications as* Heavy Metal *magazine and a variety of Marvel comics, and found himself collaborating with the likes of Bernie Wrightson and Richard Corben, among others. Eventually he headed up Pacific Comics, guiding that indy publisher's line with some real success. And then, quite suddenly and quietly, he disappeared from the comics scene.*

Until just a few years back, that is.

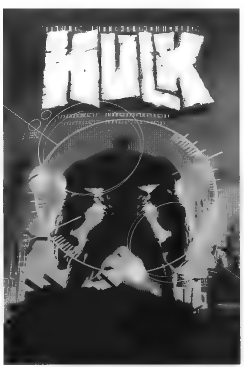
That's when a series of new shorts penned by Jones, often illustrated by his old partner in crime, Richard Corben, began appearing in various Vertigo anthologies. More recently, Jones took over the scripting chores on one of Marvel's core titles, The Hulk, *and essentially completely reinvented that book. This new approach to the Jade Giant has proven to be a phenomenally popular and successful one, allowing this seasoned pro to widen his involvement with Marvel's various properties, both new and old, and lead to his accepting an offer of working exclusively with the newly-minted House of Ideas.*

Still, these triumphs weren't certain, and the road to renewed recognition was fraught with numerous perils. Recently, Jones took a few moments to discuss how this renaissance came about, why he stepped away from comics in the first place, what he did during that sabbatical and more.

The Hulk's Smashing Success

Bruce Jones on The Hulk

An interview conducted by Bill Baker



Comic Book Marketplace: After working long and hard to establish yourself in comics, you chose to step away from it all for a rather extended period. What prompted this move, and what were you up to during your extended "vacation" from comics?

Bruce Jones: Mostly restlessness, I think. I probably thought sticking with just the one thing was making me stale and I wanted to explore other fields, like most writers and artists I suppose. Pacific Comics called in the '80s and offered me a chance to work on the West Coast as a packager, writer and editor of my own line. I drove out there, fell in love with San Diego, and decided to give it a try. I took on a ridiculous workload: two regular titles at Marvel and several more monthlies at Pacific. Something had to give and I went with Pacific mainly because of the climate of editorial freedom there and because Louise Jones (Simonson) left my Marvel titles as editor. We did *Somerset Holmes* for PC and Hollywood got interested and that led to TV and movie work and eventually moving up to LA.

Around that time I was beginning to realize if I was ever going to get serious about writing novels I'd better get started so I started doing a series of books for Dutton/Signet, Crown, Doubleday and others. After PC collapsed I just concentrated on the TV, movie and novel work. One of the keys to staying afloat in the writing business is remaining flexible.

CBM: What prompted your return to the four-color medium?

Jones: Career breaks in the entertainment business are largely serendipitous. Film and TV work tends to be seasonal, pay in big chunks, after which there

can be months of slowdown. Axel Alonso was working at DC-Vertigo and called me during one of these in-between periods with the invitation to work on some Vertigo anthology books; I think he remembered me from the Warren days or something. When he moved over to Marvel, he asked me if I'd like to try a "Tangled Web" story. That one proved popular enough to allow him to take a chance on me for *The Hulk*. And I was back doing regular comic work.

It was a long shot on Axel's part—he had a list of "A" writers to choose from whose cachet was certainly brighter than mine. I'm not sure why he went with someone known primarily as a horror writer—maybe we just clicked, or he thought my peculiar sensibilities might marry well with a title that wasn't exactly burning up the charts of late. I was pretty dubious in the beginning, but Axel's approach was to start pretty much from square one, give the book a fresh look and feel, and finally I found a way into it. But I'd be lying if I didn't admit we were holding our collective breaths when the first issue hit the stands. We knew there would be some hate mail from our approach, but none of us had the least idea it would be greeted with such enthusiasm.

Flinch #9, containing "Mostly White," by Jones/Dave Taylor/Pamela Rameo, nominated for an International Horror Guild Award.

CBM: The book's become quite a hit for Marvel since you've come on board, and garnered a lot of positive attention. What's that been like for you, and has it placed any undue pressure or expectation upon you?

Jones: Well, everyone likes to be liked. But I've always been my own toughest critic so I'm not overly concerned with public opinion or pressure. When you've been at this awhile, you realize you're not going to please everyone. Some of the stuff I've done, even in the conceptual stages, just gets lost on the reader; while things I may have thought vaguely derivative or less than top drawer is greeted with raves. If you let those kinds of parameters guide you, you'll go mad. I just work hard doing the best I can within my limited abilities. Stories are like children; you nurture and groom them, pamper and fret over them, but once you send them out into the world there's little you can do about protecting them, they must find their own way.

CBM: What kind of challenges did taking on this book present you with, and how do they compare with the typical hurdles that every project, in every medium, has to face?

Jones: Well every title, like every working situation, has its own challenges peculiar to itself: who's behind it, their aims, the kind of fan base involved. That may sound arbitrary, but I've found that for the most part nearly every medium from TV to short stories has a distinct readership or viewership: you just have to learn what the boundaries are and the latitude available within those boundaries, how far you can expand and cross them, when to pull back, etc. It's a growth process, in that your audience is hopefully growing and learning with you as you go. You don't want to strictly cater to them because that's both pandering and unjust, yet you have to some extent be aware of where your readers are coming from or you can leap too far ahead and lose them. The learning cycle is on both ends. All of this in tandem with whatever politics are currently transpiring at whatever company your involved with.

TV execs tend to be conventional and cautious—you always sense the presence of Standard and Practices hovering overhead. Comics less so. In the case of Marvel, I arrived shortly after a new regime had come into position, so there was a natural tendency to be more receptive to new ideas and concepts—everyone's getting their sea legs, leaning on the other guy, anxious to make it work, willing to put in the over-time.

CBM: There's been a real emphasis on character, particularly that of Banner, in your run. Would it be fair to say that you're investigating the psychological aspects of the horror of being tied to The Hulk, rather than the "monster of the month" aspect that has so often predominated the title in the past?

Jones: My stuff has always been largely character-driven. It's just that so much of it fell into the short story and anthology category as opposed to ongoing heroes, that it might have been less noticeable. One thing I don't think a lot of people realize is how much, like actors, writers tend to get typecast. I didn't start out to be known as "that horror writer"—I don't shun the moniker—it just wasn't orchestrated.

I began as an illustrator and drawing space ships and swamps was more appealing to me than guys in Spandex amid cityscapes. When I'm at a convention and a young person asks how to break into the business I always give the

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same advice: pack your bags, buy a good pair of shoes, and move to New York. That's where most of the work is, and to a large extent it's taking an assignment some editor has handed you. My early assignments happened to be in the horror and science fiction genre, especially once I became a regular at Warren. You work within the dictates set by your employer, and in the beginning you're just grateful to be working at all.

The thing is, you can call anything genre, I mean, what does that word even mean anymore? The important parts of good story telling like character, plot, narrative drive, etc., probably haven't changed in six thousand years, so it's not something I'm particularly conscious of. The rudiments don't vary that much, and the trappings really aren't that important. What's important—for me at least—is staying fresh and surprising the reader. The only way I can continue to do that is to continually surprise myself. The nice thing about writing is that it's largely about acquired knowledge, and we all do that by growing. So by that logic, the older you get, hopefully the better your stuff will be.

Anyway, that's the theory.

CBM: To date there's been little hard evidence of the larger Marvel Universe in your run, aside from those characters directly linked to The Hulk's past. How would you define the place of that larger world in the series, and the man-monster's place in the wider continuity?

Jones: As I mentioned before, much of this business has to do with serendipitous events. I came along—in this second go with Marvel—at a time when it was felt by the company that in some ways, the convoluted continuity was in danger of becoming a potential hindrance both in the developing of fresh ideas and in the daunting history confronting readers outside the comics arena, many of whom might otherwise be interested but who couldn't get past the plethora of previous plotlines. The very term "Marvel Universe" is a two-edged sword. It's cool to have your own mythos to operate out of, but by the same token, if you were suddenly plucked out of our solar system and into another, what would you do? You'd have no reference point. The non-comic reader faces the same enigma. To that end, we've continued with *Hulk* to use traditional Marvel characters in our run—tipping a hat toward tradition and continuity—without becoming hamstrung by it. We'll continue in this vein with upcoming super-villains, skewed through our own vision of them and their place both in this world and the Marvel Universe.

CBM: To date, we've actually seen very little of the titular character in the book. Have you felt any pressure—from editorial, the readership, or even yourself—to have The Hulk appear more often?

Jones: I've tried to deliver a narrative that is cause and effect oriented, perhaps to a fault, wherein the motives and drives of all the individual characters arise from instances derived from the plot. I don't want to become obligatory or flippant about character motivation, whatever the book's title may be; my feeling is the narrative should dictate this. If this means Banner's bigger half doesn't manifest itself physically for several issues running, so be it. But I think it's important to remember that The Hulk is always there, just as Banner is always there when you see the physical aspect of The Hulk. We've tried—maybe in ways too subtle—to express this through each arc; sometimes it just gets buried in the minutiae. Hopefully we'll become more skilled at it. In any case—thankfully—the majority of readers seem to applaud our current approach, so there's been no editorial dictum to the contrary. All of which isn't to imply there won't be future arcs in which we'll see wall-to-wall Hulk. The story's the thing. And character drives the story.

CBM: Can you tell us anything you've got planned for Bruce and company, in either the short or far term?

Jones: My lips are sealed. Seriously, one of the nice things about comics is the regularity of their appearance, and even if this isn't as frequent as TV, it's still far quicker than movies or novels. So my feeling is that divulging very much at all about future events is both a disservice to readers—much as they may clamor for it—and a real plot spoiler. Part of the fun of the medium is this soap opera quality in which reader and writer empathy are closely held; I really prefer the audience not be thinking of plot 27 while they're still digesting plot 17.

[That said,] I think everybody by now knows that, beginning with issue 50 we adopt not only a new regular artist, but also reveal our first traditional Marvel super-villain. I don't think the wait will prove disappointing. I'm not just blowing smoke when I say the best is yet to come.

CBM: How long do you see yourself working on *Hulk*?

Jones: A writer may be the last to know when his work is successful, but he's always the first to realize when it's becoming stale. I'll stay with the book until I feel there's nothing fresh left in me or until sales flag, or Marvel kicks me off, or all of the above. Right now I still feel I have stories to tell, places to go, surprises to reveal.

CBM: What's the best, or most gratifying, aspect of working on the book? What about downsides? Is there anything troubling about it?

Jones: There's much that's gratifying about both the title and my working relationship with the good people at Marvel. There's a mutual respect and empathy for the work that makes a hard job just a little bit easier. I'm still so pleased that our unorthodox approach has met with success I've no time or reason to find anything to be troubled about. It's been a great ride. Grueling, but immensely satisfying.*

Heroes of Fantasy

Collectable Character Statues

by Mike Wilbur

Before comic books "walked" the Earth, our lust for heroic adventure and larger-than-life characters was fulfilled by mythology, epic tales and, centuries later, pulp fantasy. Whether through such timeless epics as Beowulf, or Homer's *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey*, or through the works of Robert E. Howard, H.P. Lovecraft, Edgar Rice Burroughs and their contemporaries, humans have an almost insatiable thirst for fantasy and high-adventure.

Comic books, with their larger-than-life characters and their globe-spanning (sometimes galaxy-spanning) adventures, have their roots firmly planted in the rich and fertile soil of heroic fantasy. Many comic book characters and stories over the years have been inspired by, or adapted from, classic myths, legends and fantasy literature. So, it's only fair that creators of collectibles based on comic book characters likewise pay tribute to the roots and inspirations of our generation's mythology.

Perhaps the richest veins of source material mined to date for this niche of character statues are the writings of **Robert E. Howard** and the artwork of **Frank Frazetta**. Acknowledged masters of their respective fields, both have inspired legions of fans and countless imitators with the wealth of powerful characters they've created and depicted. And of course, as fans and aficionados are aware, many of Frazetta's most memorable paintings served as covers to posthumous collections of Howard's (and Burroughs') epic stories.

The first major genre release was **Randy Bowen**'s 1994 bronze rendition of Frazetta's **Death Dealer**, produced in collaboration with **Dark Horse Comics** in an edition of only 50 units. Four years later, the Death Dealer was released as a fully painted cold-cast resin piece, with some minor detail re-sculpting.

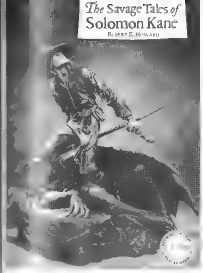
In 1996, **Clayburn Moore**, in direct cooperation with Frank Frazetta (who personally selected the subject), created "**Frazetta's Princess**," based on Frazetta's rendering of Martian princess Deja Thoris in his cover painting for Burroughs' A Fighting Man of Mars. The Princess was produced in two editions. The standard edition of 4,000 included a separate hardwood base. The Ruby Edition of 250 featured an actual cabochon ruby inset in the figure's tiara, and a marble base.

Legendary artist **Burne Hogarth** worked with artist/sculptor **Joe DeVito**, under the auspices of **Graphitti Designs**, to produce Hogarth's **Tarzan** in 1997. Hogarth was responsible for the designs, and DeVito consulted with the master regularly during the sculpting process. Hogarth approved the final prototype but, unfortunately, passed away before the product release. Edition size was limited to 500 units.

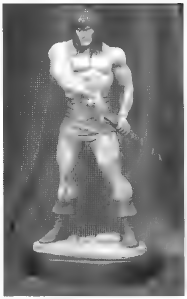
Bowen Designs checked in again in 1998, with their release of Robert E. Howard's puritan adventurer **Solomon Kane**, based on a painting by Gary Gianni done as the cover for a deluxe hardcover book, *The Savage Tales of Solomon Kane*, released the same year. Produced with a faux bronze finish, the statue includes two interchangeable right hands, one holding a sword and the other holding Kane's magical cat-headed staff. Only 550 units were produced.

(clockwise) Frazetta's Barbarian from Moore Creations, Frazetta's Death Dealer from Bowen designs and Dark Horse Comics, Frazetta's Princess from Moore Creations.

Also in 1998 came the first release from **Hard Heroes**, Robert



Solomon Kane (Howard's Puritan adventurer) from Bowen Designs and based on a Gary Gianni book cover, Conan the Barbarian (Robert E. Howard's most famous creation) from Hard Heroes and based on John Buscema's comics verson.



E. Howard's **Conan the Barbarian**. Produced in the larger 1:6 scale and sculpted by **Seth Vandable**. Conan was modeled on the comic book artwork of the late **John Buscema**, long-time illustrator of **Marvel Comics**' various Conan series.

Hard Heroes released their second Howard character statue in 1999, Atlantean warrior **King Kull**. Like Conan, Kull was sculpted by Seth Vandable, and based on the comic book version of Howard's hero. The Marvel Comics rendition was first visualized by artist **Berni Wrightson** in a try-out story in *Creatures on the Loose* #10, before Kull gained his own title. The statue design is inspired by imagery in the Kull origin story "By This Axe I Rule," drawn by **Mike Ploog**.

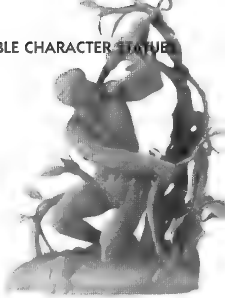
One of the most impressive and ambitious Howard/Frazetta pieces came in 2000 from the talented hands of Clayburn Moore. That year, Moore Creations released the massive **Frazetta's Barbarian** to eagerly waiting fans who had been awed by the prototype on display at the previous summer's ComiCon International in San Diego. Based on Frazetta's cover art for the Ace paperback edition of Howard's *Conan the Adventurer*, the Barbarian's release was delayed for several months by legal wrangling over use of the Conan name. The piece, in an edition of 6,500 units, was ultimately released as Frazetta's Barbarian.

Also offered were two variant Artist's Proof editions. Both featured a hardwood base and genuine metal plating on the character's sword and knife. However, 100 were produced with only those enhancements, and 300 were produced with the woman at the barbarian's feet nude.

Hard Heroes also released their third **Howard/Marvel** statue in 2000, the warrior-maiden **Red Sonja**. Actually owing more to Marvel Comics' version than to Howard's original, Red Sonja was, like her Hard Heroes predecessors, sculpted by Seth Vandable in the large 1:6 scale.

The final entry, from 1999, also comes from Hard Heroes. Based on the artwork of famed fantasy illustrator **Ken Kelley** is the Conan-esque barbarian of **Snake Pit**. Like all of Hard Heroes' barbarian pieces, this is sculpted by Seth Vandable in large scale.

So, like comic fans, readers of heroic fantasy can also find a selection of their favorite characters brought into three dimensions for an impressive display in home or office. Watch your next business meeting turn into a debate of the relative merits of Red Sonja versus the Princess! ◍



Hogarth's Tarzan from Graphitti Designs and based on the designs of Burne Hogarth.

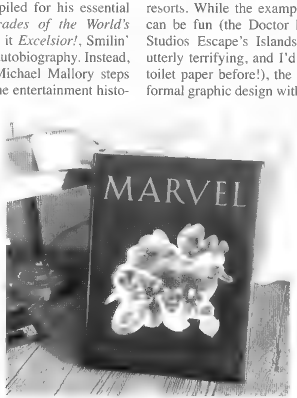
(clockwise) King Kull (Howard's Atlantean king) from Hard Heroes and based on Mike Ploog imagery, Snake Pit from Hard Heroes and based on Ken Kelley's painting, Red Sonja from Hard Heroes and based on Marvel Comics adaptation of Howard's heroine.

BOOK REVIEW BY PAUL GRAVETT

This is the most lavishly produced book I've ever come across about Marvel Comics: A black-leather bound, red foil embossed hardback, color throughout its 288 thick pages in a massive format (10 3/4 x 14 inch), and for this second edition, updated and expanded from 2001's first edition, the front cover is mounted with an exclusive new illustration by Kaare Andrew printed onto plastic. It certainly makes for an impressive, and heavy, calling card for any Marvel executive to leave on the Hollywood studios' desks.

MARVEL: THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR UNIVERSE
BY MICHAEL MALLORY

So the packaging looks great, but what about the content? Well, this is not the sort of detailed, in-depth, comics-oriented history that Les Daniels compiled for his essential 1991 *Marvel: Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics*. Then again, nor is it *Excelsior!*, Smilin' Stan Lee's frustratingly lightweight autobiography. Instead, pop culture and animation expert Michael Mallory steps back to take a broader overview of the entertainment history of Marvel's principal crossover characters, outlining their development in comic books before charting their mixed fortunes in other media—television and movies, both live action and animated, as well as merchandise, stage shows, theme park rides, computer games, even the story behind Spidey's inflatable in Macy's Thanksgiving Parade.



The seemingly upholstered book is very large.

I appreciate the fact that Mallory is a cultural commentator not so closely fixated on comics minutiae, because he is able to bring some fresh perceptions to Marvel's ongoing appeal. He identifies the Marvel Universe not as some alternative or parallel to our own, but as "a larger, greater universe that encompasses an enhanced version of our reality... [one that] completely coexists with our own." Today, now that the classic adventure continuity newspaper strips have all but vanished, his assertion is valid that, aside from TV soap operas, comic books are the only other storytelling vehicle perpetuated and elaborated by its creators across years, if not decades. To him, Marvel's heroes have transcended their comic book origins to "become pop culture icons, figures...deeply engrained in our collective unconsciousness."

There follows an encapsulated 15-paragraph history of the roots of Marvel. For any reasonably knowledgeable fan there are few revelations here, but he sets the stage for what is to follow and throughout he has carried out fresh interviews with some of the people who were there.

The second chapter, "The Marvel Influence," surveys how Marvel has entered our everyday lives, from 1970s slang "hulking out," meaning to lose control (and to turn green and burst out of your shirt, perhaps?) to background and photos of the 1999 *Spider-Man: On Stage* rock musical performed only in England in the Butlin's chain of 'holiday camps' or vacation resorts. While the examples of merchandise and spin-offs can be fun (the Doctor Doom Fearfall ride at Universal Studios Escape's Islands of Adventure in Florida looks utterly terrifying, and I'd never seen the Hulk and Spidey toilet paper before!), the quality of the shots and the very formal graphic design with lots of white space lack the richness and genius that Chip Kidd has brought to his books on Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman and *Peanuts*. Nevertheless, there are plenty of choice, crisply reproduced stills from fondly remembered adaptations and of course from the latest Marvel blockbusters, *Blade* and *Spider-Man*.

In the rest of the book, Mallory devotes whole chapters to Captain America, Spider-Man, The Incredible Hulk and X-Men, in order of their appearance, and then examines the rest of the Marvel Universe from Fantastic Four to Blade, from their printed page origins to their assorted incarnations on the big and small screen. He has interviewed the actors, producers, story supervisors, stuntmen and voice actors for the animated versions. He affectionately recalls the first 1960s Marvel TV cartoons, made for only $6,000 per cartoon using one of the very first

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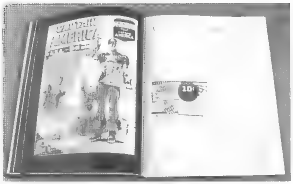
ART © MARVEL CHARACTERS

Xerox photocopying machines, through to the recent advances in computer animation, led by 1995's *Spider-Man: The Animated Series* for Fox. TV cartoons have come a long way from the primitive technology and shoestring budgets of those first efforts. As voice actor John Vernon recalls, "The way we switched voices from Tony Stark to Iron Man was to put a Styrofoam cup over the face!"

Stuntman Fred Waugh reveals the risks he took performing some of the wall-crawling and jumps up to the ceiling in the 1977 *Spider-Man* TV movie, while Lou Ferrigno as The Hulk describes the shoot where he pounded away to break through a supposedly fake wall, only to discover later that he had actually demolished a real wall. It's also a pleasure to glimpse Roger Corman's notorious embargoed Fantastic Four movie. Mallory writes that it has never been screened in public, but pirated copies circulate and I saw it screened unofficially at a London Comic Convention some years ago. Tom de Falco says about the film, "I think if it was for the small screen, it probably would have got a lot of laughs." Sadly, he's right there—it brought the house down.

Do I get a "No Prize" for spotting some occasional minor slip-ups? I don't think there was ever a Marvel monster named "Gordo" (actually the Mexican hero of the long-running newspaper strip by Gus Arriola); maybe Joe Sinnott was thinking of *Gorgo*, originally a movie adaptation drawn by Ditko for Charlton. More annoying is the repetition of the last paragraph of Chapter 2 and the index, which appears to be lacking more than a few entries. And it's a missed opportunity not to show at least some original black line artwork from the comic books themselves. True, we do get to see a few preparatory drawings for the animation, but almost all the comic book images are reproduced from the garish Masterworks re-masterings. By choosing these brighter, more sharply printed versions, was somebody thinking that the old newsprint would look too dated, faded, fuzzy or nostalgic for a volume which reads and feels at times like a handsome marketing tool to hype these 21st century media "properties"?

In all though, after some initial misgivings about the book's deluxe production and purpose, I warmed to Mallory's enthusiasm and thoroughness, deriving from insider knowledge rather than unquestioning fannishness, although plot synopses rarely make any film sound exciting and he seems able to find something to praise in even the least inspired media spin-offs. Except, that is, for George Lucas's *Howard the Duck*, a $37 million flop, an unmitigated disaster and still hushed Hollywood-speak for the worst in "overblown, uncontrolled filmmaking." Still, it would be much easier for me to recommend that you buy this book, if it wasn't quite so expensive. You could always hold off for now. They are going to need to add all the other Marvel movies coming to our screens, so it's going to need another update soon anyway, so how about a smaller, more affordable soft cover trade edition sometime in the future, please? At least this is one fancy package that does have some content.



The color comic art is from deluxe reprintings.

Decades' worth of animation is covered.

Sgt. Fury and Howlers in deep trouble.

Several "Special Comics Information" pages scattered through the book give master class tidbits, this one on Marvel everyman Rick Jones. Approved for all ages!

Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, Inc. (www.hlla.com);
288 10 3/4 x 14 inch pages; $75.00; ISBN 0-88363-110-5

The Michael Naiman Report

Mighty Marvel Musings

I Should Have Learned My Lesson Part II. One would think that by now, I'd listen to my own sage advice and not try to explain to The Woman In My Apartment about comic book crossovers. Why don't I listen to me? I did it again! Went to see the thoroughly enjoyable CATCH ME IF YOU CAN and reveled in the Barry Allen joke in the movie. And what did I do? Gave an elbow to her during the sequence and immediately got Shushed! by a few folks sitting around me. After the movie I once again attempted to "explain the humor" and got —The Blank Stare. I swear—never again!

All-Star Auction's upcoming March event will have some powerhouse items. John Romita's personal favorite cover of all time .. Amazing Spider-Man #40 will be available along with the original cover from Frazetta's THUNDA #1! There will be three Norman Mingo paintings from the MAD paperbacks of Abominable Snow MAD, The Pocket MAD and Good and MAD. If that's not enough, there's comics that'll include War Against Crime #10, a very key issue in the EC universe and it's graded 9.8 NM/MT (Gaines File Copy).

Also look for the highest grade square bound copies of Superman Annual #6 NM; Amazing Spider-Man Annual #1 VF+, #2 NM-; America's Best TV Comics NM; Batman Annual #1 VF/NM, #2 VF, #3 VF-, #4 NM, #5 NM, #6 NM-, #7 VF-; Dynamo #1 VF/NM, #2 NM-; 80 Pg Giants #6 (Winnepeg) NM; Fantastic Four Annual #1 NM-; Flash Annual NM-, Sgt Fury Annual #1 NM, #2 VF/NM; Strange Tales Annual #1 VF, #2 VF/NM.

Other great issues included will be Walt Disney's Comics and Stories #1, 8.5, the highest CGC graded copy; as well as the very rare file copies of Donald Duck Fun Book #1 & #2.

In reading some of the comic book forums, I note that there are some forum hacks who are "nauseated" (directly quoted from the forum text) by the fact that I mention the very existence of Disney comics, Carl Barks et. al. Seems they think I must be getting a royalty every time I use the "D" word! Never mind that Disney Comics are the biggest selling comics in the known world. More comics are sold in one week in Europe than all the other US publishers sell combined in a year! Isn't it time for some folks to broaden their viewpoint of the hobby?

More than fifty years ago, Boys and Girls March of Comics released a shoe store giveaway comic book that featured Carl Barks' now-classic Donald Duck adventure, "Maharajah Donald." The people who acquired that free comic book didn't realize it at the time, but it was destined to become one of the most valuable and sought-after collectibles in today's market. Gemstone recently acquired the license to publish Disney comics, and has decided to kick off its new line of Disney comic books with "Maharajah Donald" as its offering for Free Comic Book Day which will be on May 3, 2003. If you were to buy a mint copy of the original book now, it would cost you more than $7,000, but this is your opportunity to own it for the original cover price—nothing!

Also included is the original two-page back-up story, "The Peaceful Hills" and the original March of Comics front cover, which is reprinted on the back cover of the Gemstone giveaway. Gemstone's new line of Disney comics will hit stores beginning in June 2003, making the Free Comic Book Day edition a perfect introduction to the line. Perhaps Free Comic Book Day will get some new (younger) readers and their parents through the doors.

Speaking of a New Generation of readers. According to long time elementary school teacher (and new father) Mick Rabin, "When my kids behave, I hand out good behavior cards which they accumulate to trade in for "stuff," the most popular of which are the comic books that I keep in a box. I prefer G-rated stuff or anything published before 1982 (when the code had a stronger influence). Best stuff is Archie, Ducks, Disney, Richie Rich and Casper. My kids like Spider-Man a lot, but most of the time, the reading is a bit tougher than most of them can handle. Now those Spidey Super Stories are perfect for my students. Any Golden Age super-hero reprint books I keep in a corner of my classroom (not for giveaway, but rather to be read during a free-reading time). Anybody who wants to send comics for the kids can send it to my work address: Mick Rabin, Oak Park Elementary, 2606 54th St., San Diego, CA 92105."

One last Disney comment (for those about to be nauseated—avert your eyes!)—a copy of Uncle Scrooge #179 in Fine condition recently sold on eBay for $330. That's 2.89X times Guide.

By the time this column hits the racks, Daredevil would have premiered. From the previews, it sure looks good. Regardless if this is successful or flops, there will continue to be super-heroes splashing onto the silver screen. The new X-Men movie will be out in May, the Incredible Hulk in June and Spidey sometime

next year. Keeping the genre in the consciousness of the public will undoubtedly help retail sales. If not the comics, then certainly the peripheral items such as toys, T-shirts, video games and action figures.

Long time San Diego retailer Greg Pharis of San Diego Comics and Collectibles says "As far as sales and popularity are going, it's Marvel's Ultimate line that is doing very well! Ultimate Daredevil and Elektra, U. Spider-Man, U. War, and U. X-Men. Also, the Amazing Spider-Man is putting up good numbers. Since Johns has been writing Avengers and Alan Davis has been on Thor, those two titles have spiked. But the big one is coming from DC. With Jim Lee doing the art chores on Batman (starting with #608) sales have skyrocketed. I was selling about 25 Batman copies per month, now it's around 125. Lee needs to do all their titles!

Jamie Newbold of SoCalComics reports, "The second year of Ultimate titles is running full bore, but the number of readers climbing on board these and other Marvel titles has slowed a bit. Still, Marvel titles sell better, on average, than any other company.

Ted Van Liew of SuperWorld has some musings on Mighty Marvel, "As usual, high-grade Silver Age Marvels lead the way. They've become a market unto themselves! Basically any book up through the mid-1970's sells quickly if it's in NMy grade. Marvels from around 1965 and earlier have become so difficult to locate in high grade that fussy collectors are finally settling for VFs. Certified Marvels are outta control, especially if they're significant in any way, or earlier issues. Books in less than VF, except for early issues, we usually discount a little bit, and they sell steadily. For me, '70s books are the big growth area now, since many cool books are still pretty affordable. Even the expensive ones have an enormous upside! While the Marvels are no-brainers, collectors seem to pick and chose more with DCs. It's ironic, because the DCs are ten times harder to find in decent shape than Marvels. Of course, the recent overwhelming success of the super-hero related movies in the theaters has given us a big boost. Who amongst the true blue collecting community would have guessed years ago that our little hobby would become so recognizable to the mainstream? We always knew that this is the coolest hobby in the universe, but it took the rest of the world a while to come around! Some of my recent Marvel sales include: X-Men # 4 CGC NM- 9.2 $1450, #3 CGC VF/NM 9.0 $800; Surfer #4 NM- $575, Tales to Astonish #56 NM- $185, Amazing Spider-Man #6 VG $215.

Jamie Graham, owner of the nine-store chain Graham Crackers reports "The core Marvel titles are selling so well that we sell out every month. Too bad we can't get reorders! We can't keep them in stock! Silver Age Spidey's in high grade up to #150 sell as fast as I get them in—IF I get them in. The Internet is a tough competitor, but only in the lower grades. I wish I could hold on to the first print Marvel Masterworks—they come in, they go out. The fact that they look so good on a bookshelf helps their salability. We try to keep the children's oriented books at their eye level. Disney Ducks and Archie are my biggest sellers for that age group. Parents looking for the Marvel statues bring in their kids and plop them down with a Donald Duck or Little Archie that I have for 'reading'—and it just doesn't get any better than that! New customers being developed right before my eyes!" ™

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MARKET REPORTS

Al Stoltz
BASMNTCOMX@AOL.COM
443-831-2761

Mid Ohio seems to have also reflected the slowdown that has been occurring at other shows this last quarter of the year. Back issues were down overall, and it took an extra 10% to entice customers to spend a few dollars on that want list. The buyer is now walking up to the tables with blinders on and only targeting those few items that they deem as very necessary to the collection.

I am sure it is a mix of crazy economy and Christmas that has stalled the buying frenzy I experienced all spring and summer The insanity attached to **high grade numbers** like 9.6 or better is just unfathomable to me. New collectors are coming in and seeking ungraded material at wish prices and stunned when many dealers advise them that they either slab those few items or are looking themselves for books of that caliber. After explaining that thought the reaction is the same, they look at the rest of the thousands of books before them as sub-par and walk away I guess unless it is pre-picked and labeled as High Grade, they have no real feel for items when digging through boxes to maybe unearth a gem hiding in there!

Box digging in general is down the last few months. At a recent local show I attended in Virginia, only a few dared take the time to look for books that perhaps were not on the radar but may be of some interest if seen. If only comic retailers could peer into a magic ball and bring the 50 books that would sell. Ahhh, my back would be so much better.

It seems that first issues were on everyone's Christmas list in Ohio. Here are some of the **items sold** that weekend: A very clean Playboy #1 VG+ $1200; Avengers #1 VF- $1150; Green Lantern #1 GD+ $275; Justice League #1 GD+ $265; House of Secrets #92 VG+ $88; My Greatest Adventure #80 (1st Doom Patrol) FN $200.

A great hunger for first issues and Dell Four Colors made our weekend in the snow at least turn out all right. Thanks goes to **Roger Price** for another job well done and having the show again in the most perfect of hotels and areas. This is a show that could not get any better for dealers to unload and get food just a few hundred feet away—some of us are just so easy to please.

Ron Capitini/Bruce Ellsworth
PO Box 931
Little Elm, TX 75068

Unlike most years, every show we attended this summer and fall was **profitable** Since we do not sell new comics and sell Gold and Silver Age books, that seemed to work for us this year. **San Diego** was the most profitable show of the year with Marvel, sci-fi, horror and westerns flying off the wall. Many key Marvel issues were selling along with encapsulated high grade copies of super-heroes and western comics DC GA was slow with the exception of Wonder Woman and Flash.

Timelys sold well as long as they weren't CGCed. Golden Age (unless it is NM) does not sell in a plastic holder because people that collect these books want to smell, feel and read them!

The **Dallas** show was interesting with the Nick Cage auction coinciding with the convention. Attendance was excellent, the largest crowd of people I've seen at a Dallas show Golden Age and esoteric companies such as Fiction House, Fox and Nedor were popular. Rullah, JoJo, Planet, Phantom Lady and Schaumburg Startling issues were happening Anything pertaining to Daredevil and Hulk sold immediately at Guide.

CGC issues do not sell well at shows even in 9.4 or 9.6.These items are now only selling on eBay. We went to four major shows in a row, displaying 60 books and only sold two! We will no longer display CGC books at the shows we attend.

On a lighter note, **Carrie Fisher** came by our table and purchased a bunch of romance comics. Princess Leia never looked so good!

Most dealers were paranoid to go to the **Baltimore** show because of the sniper situation. That was resolved two days before the show opened, making everyone breathe a little easier I sure was thankful I was not a target while moving my merchandise in. Attendance was great on Saturday with **Marvel Silver** selling well. Sunday turned out slower due to the Ravens football game. We did, however, have a better Sunday than Saturday because we had the right guy come by and buy all my Spider-Man issues from #1 to 50 at Guide! Dave Alexander would have been proud! All in all, a great show.

The last stop was **New York National** show, which is the east coast version of San Diego. There were more guests and artists than any

other show besides San Diego Playboy Bunnies and Penthouse Pets, underground artists, wrestlers, Al Feldstein, Joe Linsner, Sal Buscema, Sergio Argones and Mike Kaluta to name a few. This is one show where **everything sold**. No one thing was popular with the exception of Daredevil and Superman.

The **Internet** marketplace is alive and well, with little in the way of compromise—many going for Guide or more. Silver Age Marvel is on fire with heavy interest in Fantastic Four, Avengers and off-brand hero titles. DC is no trail horse online either with High Grade Adams Batman and Detective bringing over market value and Adventure Comics selling strong. DC War rocks with the Rock—with Low Grade books bringing FN+ Guide.

CGC, look out! Many books are not bringing in those top prices like they once did. Has supply met demand or have the collectors found out they can't read the X-ray spec ads any

CBM MarketWatch

A report of market indicator sales (including % of Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide) by Michael Naiman

Adventure
#269 VG $13 22%
#275 FN $18 23%
#304 GD $16 1.55X

Amazing Spider-Man
#2 VG $395 79%
#6 GD+ $113 90%
#9 VG $153 87%
#10 VG $87 54%
#11 FN+ $110 76%
#12 VG- $77 80%
#13 FN+ $92 48%
#13 VG- $66 52%
#14 VG+ $93 30%
#17 VG $58 52%
#18 VF- $178 58%
#22 VF $350 1.73X
#23 FN+ $122 1.04X
#23 FN+ $113 97%
#25 FN+ $114 1.27X
#38 FN $28 47%
#38 VF $57 41%
#39 FN $52 67%
#40 VG $23 35%
#45 FN $27 75%
#51 VF- $56 43%
#51 FN $22 41%
#52 VF $40 62%
#52 VF $37 57%
#66 VF $40 80%
#68 NM $52 65%
#72 NM $79 99%
#98 VF $59 77%
#100 VF $109 78%
#100 FN $31 50%
#101 VF-$66 65%
#102 FN $20 66%
#129 NM $155 67%
#135 VF $26 65%
#300 NM $41 55%

Avengers
#1 VG $265 61%
#2 FN+ $201 1.22X
#3 GD $36 92%
#4 FN+ $255 59%
#4 GD $111 77%

Batman
#125 VG $19 35%
#168 FN $17 63%
#168 VF $40 62%
#170 VF $50 77%
#200 VF $31 34%
#232 VF $73 Guide
#234 VF $74 79%

Boy Explorers
#1 VF $405 1.02X

Brave and Bold
#3 FN $112 68%
#6 VG $72 84%
#10 FN $76 59%
#14 FN $50 50%
#34 GD $50 28%
#34 VF $592 39%
#35 FN $81 60%
#36 FN $104 85%
#43 FN $51 51%

Captain America
#100 VG+ $34 46%
#100 FN+ $76 68%
#108 NM $51 1.02X

Daredevil
#1 VG $565 1.77X
#5 GD $17 85%
#6 VG $31 1.10X
#6 GD $41 2.93X
#8 GD $21 1.5X
#15 VF $36 68%
#18 VF $44 98%
#68 FN $36 6X
#100 VF $36 1.89X
#131 VF $66 3.88X
#168 NM $96 1.75X

Fantastic Four
#12 VG- $215 1.01X
#48 VG $123 79%
#100 VF $45 69%

Four Color
#62 VG $202 63%
(DD in Frozen Gold)
#135 VF $61 36%
(Felix the Cat)
#145 VF $50 55%
(Popeye)
#152 VF $39 40%
(Little Orphan Annie)
#328 GD $23 82%
(DD in Old California)
#631 VF $36 26%
(Davy Crockett)

House of Mystery
#187 VF- $15 88%
#204 NM- $26 93%
#212 VF $46 4.18X
#251 NM $46 2.87X
#252 NM $13 78%
#260 NM $7 93%
#294 NM $7 Guide
#300 NM $11 88%
#304 NM $10 Guide
#306 NM $10 Guide
#309 NM $10 Guide
#310 NM $11 1.05X
#313 NM $9 85%
#315 NM $8 80%
#316 NM $8 80%
#317 NM $8 80%
#318 NM $10 Guide
#319 NM $8 66%
#320 NM $7 70%

House of Secrets
#85 VF $20 77%
#89 NM $16 57%
#92 VF $358 93%
#92 VF $198 51%

Mystery in Space
#32 VF $126 62%
#33 VF $101 50%
#37 VF $95 48%
#50 VF $54 36%

Namora
#1 VG $396 84%

Nick Fury
#1 NM $100 71%
#1 NM $107 76%
#1 NM $101 72%
#1 NM $111 79%

Sensation
#7 GD $164 1.56X
#40 FN $200 1.33X
#86 FN $152 1.45X
#106 GD $70 1.63X

Showcase
#30 GD $38 60%
#31 FN $36 32%
#34 VG $80 37%
#36 VG $43 43%

Silver Surfer
#2 VF $72 54%
#3 VF $75 67%
#4 VF $250 83%
#5 VF $73 1.04X
#6 VF $32 46%
#8 VF $37 65%
#9 VF $36 64%
#11 VF $32 71%
#14 VF $59 94%
#15 VF $36 80%
#18 VF $31 69%

Thor
#133 VF $29 67%
#137 VF $27 64%
#138 VF $21 50%
#138 NM $27 39%
#142 VF $29 76%
#143 VF $22 58%
#147 VF $31 82%
#150 VF $29 76%
#152 VF $19 66%
#157 NM $16 36%
#164 VF $47 2.04X
#165 VF $103 2.29X
#166 VF $103 2.71X
#176 VF $15 65%
#179 NM- $21 60%
#186 VF $17 1.13X
#192 VF $25 1.66X

more?

Golden Age is hot! If you have a great reputation you can expect Guide or better from a customer, sight unseen. **Pre-Code horror** is hotter than Satan's lunch! Sold a GD/VG Weird Tales of the Future #2 for close to $300—two-and-a-half times Guide! Avon's Diary of Horror #1 went for a CGC VF price without being slabbed. The Internet is keeping our hobby alive and strong with what I think is integrity and trust making a comeback with a large professional dealer base to chose from.

Sales. Amazing Spider-Man #1 VG $170, #6 FN $400, #14 NM+ $8000, #14 VF $1600, Daredevil #1 VF $1600, VG $300, #168 NM $110; Fantastic Four #1 VG $1700, #4 G $250, #5 FA/GD $200, #48 FN $250; Journey Into Mystery #83 VG $600; X-Men #1 VG CGC $1200, #1 FN+ $2000; Superman #4 GD $550, #14 FN $900.

Robert Letscher II

Key Comics
PO Box 5035
Mesa, AZ 85211
480-890-0055

The abundance of quality material coming to market in recent months, both on eBay and in the "big" auctions that occur with increasing frequency, seems to have perhaps created the perception of a mild glut, where the **supply exceeds** the available dollars. I've noticed many items selling at rates that are lower than just a few months back (not drastically lower, but still noteworthy). With consumer concerns about the economy and the US going to war, there is no wonder that people might be holding on to their money a little tighter. Those in the know use these times to fill in some holes in their runs, or perhaps upgrade some of the old favorites, as some bargains can be found with just a little persistence.

I have noticed a lot of lower dollar items selling well, but some of the pricier books are a little tougher, with the exception of the upper grade **Silver Age Marvels** and trendier "hot books," which are always a quick sale! Most Amazing Spider-Man comics sell well, regardless of the age or grade. (It helps that the new DVD of the Spider-Man movie contains plenty of comic-book oriented material, including great images of dozens of classic old webslinger comics and interviews with many well-known Spidey writers and artists, all helping to foster a new legion of Spidey comic fans!) Bronze Age books continue to receive increasing interest, as does comic production art.

A few examples of some of our latest sales include: Tales of Suspense #59 FN $60; Batman #256 NM $40; Watchmen Hardcover $30; Amazing Spider-Man #99 VF $24, #121 VG- $64, #128 VF $22, #137 NM $60, #147 NM- $20, #299 NM+ $20; Comic Book Marketplace #6 NM $21. (I had to throw in a plug for my favorite mag: CBM! Anyone who doesn't yet subscribe owes it to themselves to get in touch with their inner comic-fiend and order that handy subscription!)

Sales of **CGC-graded** books continues unabated, but with a mild softening of the frenzy on all but the CGC census toppers. Here's a few recent **samples**: Batman: The Dark Knight Returns #2 CGC NM+ 9.6 $46; Amazing Spider-Man #102 CGC VF 8.0 $90, #126 CGC VF+ 8.5 $40; Machine Man #1 CGC NM+ 9.6 $36; Tales of Suspense #65 CGC VF+ 8.5 $101; Zip Comics #1 CGC GD- 1 8 $400.

Interest in comic book art is still strong for everything from the original line art to the color seps! More fans express interest in covers from the **Jack Adler Collection** with each passing week. Here are a few of the Adler pieces that have churned in the last couple of weeks: Mr. Miracle #9 Approval Cover $150; Tarzan #225 Approval Cover $140; Superman Family #166 Hand-Colored Cover $160; Superboy #178 Hand-Colored Cover $200, #150 Approval Cover $150.

As the supply diminishes, while fan recognition grows, I expect prices to creep on up in the coming months and years. There's not much that's cooler than having a part of history, in the form of comic production art, to go along with your memories of a favorite comic book from your youth—or even a recent favorite, for that matter! And once an item is sold it may never hit the market again. So sometimes prices can far exceed what one might expect if just a couple of dedicated fans decide they want to be the proud owner of a certain piece. (I know I've kicked myself more than once when I missed out on something unique over just a few bucks.)

Patrick Marchbanks

Golden Age Comics & Games
PO Box 8822
Gulfport, MS 39506
www.GoldenAgeCollectibles.com
228-860-0256

It is once again time for a review of the market from way down south! The last few months have been totally **exhilarating** with record prices being realized almost every day. A majority of these record-setting prices have been achieved by **Heritage Comic Auctions**, who throughout the last year has carried out some of the most amazing comic auctions ever to be undertaken, and who has offered material rarely ever seen for sale. Heritage has truly become a force in the vintage collectible marketplace.

Conventions these past months have also been remarkable with turnouts that appear to be far superior to last year, with almost all events having a decent amount of Golden and Silver Age material available for sale.

Sales have been very steady over the last few months both from our website and auctions held on eBay with the majority of the books being sold achieving **above Guide** prices. I have experienced a large amount of requests from customers looking for runs of mid-grade books, with only a few select customers in search of exceptionally High Grade material. In addition, the current sales of CGC encapsulated books have been very consistent over the past few months. Restored books have also been selling well provided the work was professionally done and limited to a moderate amount of work.

Recent sales: Batman #10 VG $625; Captain America Comics #1 (coverless, missing cf) $800; Captain Marvel Jr. #2 GD $250; Fantastic Four #1 VG $1700; Motion Picture Funnies #2, 3, 4 (covers) $910; Superman #4 App. FN $1500; X-Men #1 CGC FN+ $1800

Ronnie Murry

Fresno, CA
bigroncomics@yahoo.com
559-285-9751

I've had a number of requests lately for many of the Archie, Hanna Barbera cartoon, Harveys and the various Dell **funny animal** titles. With the virtually non-stop barrage of many of the classic cartoons from the thirties to the present on the assorted cartoon channels, it seems to have rekindled interest in this genre. At different shows people of all ages stop at the booth and either request specifically, or stumble across something during their browsing and say something like "Hey, I just saw this on TV the other day." Next thing you know another happy memory has been satisfied by being able to affordably purchase something to share with their family and friends. One of the best things about these books is the good clean fun aspect of most of them. Usually there's a nice dose of irony, morality and, more often than not, a clearly defined sense of right and wrong. One of the best parts is that usually it's all contained within a five- to seven-page story from start to finish. It leaves the readers with an immediate sense of satisfaction. None of the unresolved feelings you encounter until you find the next issue to complete or continue a certain storyline. Not so with the above mentioned companies. If you haven't checked some of them out in a while I recommend it. They're kind of wacky with clever writing and with some nice simple artwork as well.

Sales on **super-hero** and assorted titles remain steady on all fronts in all grades. Lower grades move briskly when priced accordingly. As usual, higher grades demand and easily sell at Guide and above, sometimes way above. We all know **Daredevil** speculation is kind of running rampant in the Silver, Bronze and Modern periods. (Hmmm—I guess that covers all of them.) At the time of this writing, DD #1 in CGC 9.2 is demanding roughly six grand. Other issues in High Grade are blasting through the roof as well. Two of the most mind-boggling sales I saw on eBay were a couple of copies of #131, both ending up in the nine hundred dollar range for 9.6 copies. Wow!

I have also followed a couple of **Bill Everett original art** pages from issue one on eBay hovering around the five to eleven grand price range. Gulp! With what early Spider-Man and Fantastic Four pages are going for, it seems kind of reasonable. Especially considering it is number one. What on earth happened? It will be very interesting to see how prices fluctuate as the movie draws nearer. Have no regrets, we all had our chances. Some we capitalized on and others we didn't. I have found that I can't buy everything, but thank God for conventions and eBay, at least we can gaze upon some of the unobtainable, if only for just a moment. Collecting, buying, selling and trading is going pretty darn well for me on all fronts, and I hope it is going well for everyone else as well.

One **failed eBay sale** was a House of Secrets #92 CGC 9.4 that topped out at $1925. I didn't sell it to the high bidder because he did not meet my payment deadline as described in my eBay listing. The individual who won did not have the money to pay within the seven days given, and attempted to stall out the payment by sending a very small amount as a down payment via Paypal with the "hope" of having more at a later date. I sent it back. I wish eBay would try to figure out some way of sorting out people who don't really have the funds to complete their fantasy bidding with the hopes of having money sometime in the future. I am kind of glad the sale did not go through though, because HoS #92 is really a tough book to find in the NM range and I was able to put it back into my collection. I'm sure many sellers have similar stories of wishful, hopeful, hopeless and deadbeat bidders.

Some **sales:** Amazing Spider-Man #10 VF+ $400, #11 FN $150, #13 VG+ $120, #16 VG+ $100, #20 FN+ $150, #22 VG+ $100, #28 CGC 8.0 $311, #32 CGC 9.2 $406; Avengers #6 CGC 9.0 $212, #7 CGC 8.0 $123; Daredevil #4 CGC 8.0 $195, #6 CGC 9.0 $157, #7 CGC 8.0 $340, #18 CGC 9.4 $278, #19 CGC 9.4 $283, #28 CGC 9.2 $61, #29 CGC 9.0 $62, #31 CGC 8.5 $36,

#32 CGC 9.0 $40, #34 CGC 8.5 $27, #36 CGC 9.2 $79, #37 CGC 9.2 $96, #40 CGC 8.5 $26, #41 CGC 9.2 $67, #45 CGC 9.2 $79, #46 CGC 8.5 $26, #47 CGC 9.0 $39; Incredible Hulk #104 CGC 9.6 $461; Giant-Size X-Men #1 CGC 9.0 $515; X-Men #10 CGC 9.0 $290.

Jeff Rader
Offbeat Archives
PO Box 2188
Gilroy, CA 95020
408-268-6522

It looks like comics, at least in my neck of the e-woods, are going strong. The type of books I sell rarely follow any trend related to the Guide so some go below Guide but just as often go over Guide and even multiples, and unslabbed at that. I start everything, be it a cheap giveaway or a High Grade super-hero, at **$0.99** with no reserve, so I let the market decide the value. I haven't regretted it yet. I rarely use the Guide as anything except just that. Lately it seems that more and more collectors are doing the same. Some titles you'd be lucky to get a mere glimpse of for the Guide price and others you couldn't sell for Guide if you threw in a free car.

Take Pep Comics, for example, any die-hard collector knows that to get any issue before #50 they're going to have to fight tooth and nail. Then there are the mid-grade DC Silver. In my opinion, these are some of the funniest reads around, but just try to get Guide for a VG Action #300.

Another amazing trend is **coverless** books. Coverless?? Yep, I love watching auctions of otherwise great books end at wild prices as collectors who cannot afford higher-grade copies battle it out to fill that gap in their collection. A while back there was a seller on eBay that had a listing for Coverless Old Comic. I told him that it might help if he listed the fact that it was an Amazing Spider-Man #5. Talk about a bidding war! And one very happy and surprised seller. To think, most of us had boxes of this junk wasting valuable space at some point. Now all those coverless books are potential CGC Qualified copies.

Another thing I noticed was how many lots in the latest Heritage Signature Auction went **unsold**. I just received their list of unsold lots available for straight out sale. There were 11 pages of such lots, including the Kansas City VF/NM 9.0 Captain America #1 and a CGC NM 9.6 Amazing Spider-Man. Does this mean that upper-end comics are finally meeting a bit of resistance? Does it mean that many books have moved beyond a price that is attainable to the majority of collectors? Or does it mean that they have been traded back and forth between a few upper-echelon collectors, falsely inflating the value far beyond their true value. It could be any of the above but something definitely is happening. I really wonder how many collectors, in the true sense of the word, actually value these books as highly as they are touted to be worth.

I get quite a few want lists and the one common factor is the word **affordable**. There is no shortage of collectors but there is a shortage of people willing to pay a hyper-inflated price for a book that they need. Nothing is must-have enough to have to take out a second mortgage. I have been hearing more than a few horror stories about over-grading. It surprises me that some are able to remain in business after some of the tales I have heard. So, what that means is, though I always have a gripe about the rampant slabbing of books, I must begrudgingly admit that CGC does have a place in holding rampant over-graders accountable. How many people can you fleece before the walls finally come tumbling down? That being said, I still think we need to hold CGC accountable (and I more than appreciate all that Michael has done in that arena) and push for the disclosure of their grading standards. Until then I will still have to throw in an occasional rant.

Walter Clark brought up an excellent point in the letter column in CBM #95 about a book that was actually used as a **grading example** in the Grading Guide but assigned a higher grade by CGC. It may not seem like much but there is a difference between a VF and a NM-. Another interesting area I have been keeping an eye on is the Gaines File Copies. When these were first brought to light they were graded and numbered from highest to lowest grades. These books were graded by Russ Cochran, Bob Overstreet and Jerry Weist, men who have been in the hobby for ages and have helped set the standards that we all grew to accept as the grading standards. Now that quite a few have been slabbed and have come to market there seems to be a bit of discrepancy between what the original graders considered best and what CGC labeled them.

There is always the possibility that some may have actually dropped slightly in grade over the intervening years but I can't think that they would drop too much. There is also the fact that, when first graded, these men had all copies at hand and were in a better position than anybody to tell which copies were better than others. Wouldn't it make sense that the CGC grades assigned would pretty much parallel the original graders opinions? That's not the case. It is interesting to compare how some Gaines File Copies compare in the pecking order they have ended up with now that they reside in slabs. Maybe one of these days I'll compile

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The following "letter" was originally part of Michael Naiman's "Market Report" for this issue.

A topic

My topic is one of disappointment with Heritage and their policy of bidding on their own material in auctions. Regardless of whether they disclose it in their catalog or not, make announcements to the physical audience, or ring bells that the house bought the book it is a conflict of interest. I have seen it stated in writing that they pay the full bidders fee of 15%, however they also get the 10% sellers fee.

Example, using a 15% buyers premium/10% seller fee: Book hammers down at $100,000. Heritage cost $115,000 - $10,000 seller fee = Heritage cost $105,000. My cost $115,000.

Now some of you will defend this practice as "everybody else does it." Well, eBay doesn't allow owners to bid on their own material. They call it "shill bidding" and it does not look good. I also don't know what material may be in an auction that Heritage owns. Without knowledge of who is on the phone bidding, how can I ensure that Heritage isn't bidding on the material? It's been stated that many of Heritage's employees are collectors. I personally know some of the folks who work at Heritage and know that you know the difference between right and wrong. And if you are concerned about your next paycheck then maybe you should question your bosses what business they want to be in—Dealer or Auctioneer?

Bob Storms 212-429-5861
RCSBLAZING@aol.com

A response

We would like to address some issues that have come up in your publication, particularly those promoted by Mr. Storms recently. We value his contributions to our industry and are sure that we are all after the same end goals, a sincere desire for ethical behavior and fair play in this hobby we all love.

To address specific issues raised in Mr. Storms' [letter]: Heritage is and intends to remain both an auctioneer and a dealer. Furthermore, most of our employees are collectors. We are therefore significant participants in this market. It would be anticompetitive—and thus we do not feel it would be fair to our consignors or the hobby in general—for Heritage and its employees to be excluded from bidding.

We disagree with the premise that an auctioneer should not also be a dealer. Your publisher, Russ Cochran, who is our good friend and a valued repeat consignor, has been both a dealer and auctioneer for many years, and has fulfilled both roles with great integrity. Like Russ Cochran, we are attempting to bring greater liquidity to the comics market. A liquid marketplace will attract new collectors, and consequently benefit our hobby and business through increased sales volume. This is a credit to Heritage and is one reason we have enjoyed such strong support from much of the dealer community.

Heritage always works to ensure that our bidding is on a level playing field with everyone else's, and that no other consignor or bidder is at a disadvantage to us. Employees who bid are not allowed to access the maximum bids of other bidders, and we all pay the same Buyer's Premium that other bidders pay (yes, Heritage receives that commission, but we would anyway). The same logic applies to the Seller's Commission. We earn our commissions by publishing the catalog and promoting the auction, not by buying material ourselves, and when Heritage or its employees choose to bid on an item, we do not bid higher (or lower) than we would otherwise.

Any consignor may specifically request that Heritage and its employees not bid on that consignor's material, and we will gladly comply. But I don't recommend it as more bidders usually means higher prices. Thus far, I am not aware of a single comics consignor ever having made such a request. Our sister company, Heritage Numismatic Auctions has had well over 10,000 consignors, and only one such consignor request throughout its 26 years in business. And that request was made with respect to one consignment (out of many) by the U.S. Government, which says a lot.

Heritage and its employees may also consign to Heritage auctions. Again, we try to ensure that no other consignor or bidder is ever at a disadvantage. Heritage employees are not

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a chart for comparisons sake. It'd be interesting to see all the given grades in one place.

Sales: A lucky buyer got a real bargain on an Abbott and Costello #40, which is a Gerber 7, for $2.75; another book that is listed as being an 8 on the scarcity index, a VG Gasoline Alley #2, with a great L.B. Cole cover no less, went for far over Guide at $115; a nice 260-pg. giant St. John Little Audrey Yearbook (a Gerber 7) went for $169 after a bit of fervent bidding; my FN Crime-Fighting Detective #15, with a gorgeous unseen in Gerber L.B. Cole cover, went for $28; a Low Grade Frankenstein #19 sold for $18, which goes to prove that books don't have to be High Grade to be enjoyed; a VG Police Badge #479 (#5), which Michelle Nolan listed as hard to find, went for $39; a FN+ copy of Betty and Me, which Scott Shaw! brought to everybody's attention as having one of the wildest innuendo covers around, sold for $36; a beautiful VF copy of Avon's Funny Tunes #1 closed at $69; a VF- copy of Lunatickle #1, a satire mag that came out not long after MAD became a magazine, went for $88; one of my favorite bidders got a real bargain on a VF+ Mr. & Mrs. J. Evil Scientist #1, and then got an offer to double his money when another collector decided they couldn't live without it.

On the Platinum front, a 1921 Percy and Ferdie #1, listed as Rare, sold to the top banana of Platinum books for $41; a Low Grade (and Rare) Classic Comics Robin Hood Flour Giveaway sold for $61; another Giveaway, Ralston's Tom Mix #2, listed as a Gerber 8, sold for $65 despite having tape inside. See, comics don't have to be confined within CGC's seal of approval to get a decent price. The best part is that most of the above comics are, in all likelihood, going to get read, believe it or not!

Purchases: I got a batch of religious comics that, if not intended to be taken seriously, are absolutely hilarious! In one, the pastor asks a drunk, "Why didn't you come forward the last time you were here?" The drunk replies, straight-faced, "Because I was too busy laughing!" What a hoot! I also picked up a Crime and Justice #25, which is listed as sexist(?) in the Guide. A Li'l Abner Square Dance Handbook gained a coveted place on my bookshelf, as well as a Hooded Horseman #27, which, until recently, had its existence questioned. After a couple of years' search I finally landed a Flintstones On the Rocks, in High Grade no less. Last but not least, I grabbed a big collection of Charlton romance books that contained a few of their spanking stories. Too bad eBay won't let me list this pornography on their site!

EBay observances: A full display case of Superman vs Muhammad Ali treasuries went untouched at $500; an ultra-rare VG+ Junior #9, with great Feldstein artwork, went for an amazing $382; a complete run of Quality's Forbidden Love #1-4 went for a bargain $260; a coverless 1933 Detective Dan, Secret Operative #48 again went unsold; a couple Giveaway collectors worked the price of Labor is a Partner up to $131; last of all, some joker appropriated the scan for the 9.4 NM Amazing Fantasy #15 from the Heritage Auction site and put it up on eBay with a $10,000 opening bid. Thankfully eBay ousted this bumbling fool.

Opinions expressed in CBM *"Market Reports" are solely those of the individual dealers and collectors who contribute them. Prices vary by location, date of transaction and other factors.*

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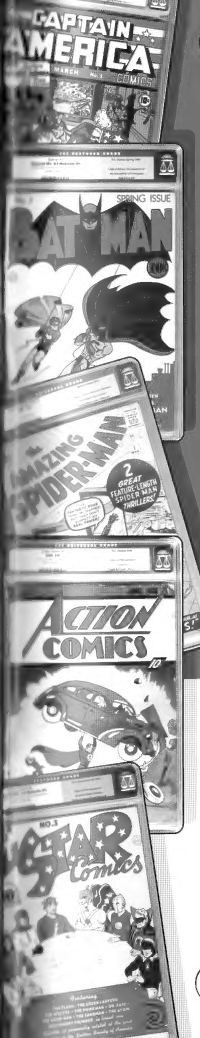
permitted to look at the high proxy bids when formulating Heritage bids on consignor's material or reserve bids on their own material. We are not allowed to trade on "inside information." We all love comics and are in this business for the long term. If we did not run an honest auction, we know that word would get around and we would not survive very long in this business. Furthermore, I could not work here, and neither could my colleagues, all of whom I know to be extremely ethical people.

Also, I believe that eBay permits its employees to participate in other members' eBay auctions, and to sell material on eBay themselves. Ebay also permits all consignors to place reserve bids within the published Terms and Conditions, as do we. We certainly don't authorize—much less encourage—shill bidding by our employees or anyone else. Indeed we do everything reasonably possible and within our power to prevent it. Heritage and its employees do not bid on their own consigned material during the auction itself, though they may place reserves on that material at least 48 hours prior to close, like any other Heritage consignor. Our policies are similar to those of most other mainstream auctioneers.

Almost any business can cheat its customers if it chooses to, and might even get away with it for a little while. But companies that do not deliver value and behave ethically are far less likely to remain in business very long. We strive to maintain a long-term perspective. I think you will find that nearly everyone who has dealt with Heritage in a meaningful way has come to trust us, for good reason. Thank you, and best regards,

John Petty, Director
Heritage Comic Auctions

CBM *reserves the right to edit letters selected for publication for length and/or content. Send communications to:* Comic Book Marketplace, *PO Box 469, West Plains, MO 65775, or email us at cbm@gemstonepub.com.*



Have you been searching for a few coveted Mile Highs?

How about that elusive Spidey in NM+ 9.6? Or a fantastic Timely that everyone wants?

Is it original art that keeps you awake at night?

YOUR SEARCH IS OVER

What you've been hunting for might be up for grabs on our website this very moment!

www.HeritageComics.com

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In 2002, Heritage Comics sold over $17.5 million worth of comics and original art at auction, and this year we plan to auction even more!

Our next auction will be March 6-9 in New York, NY.

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